



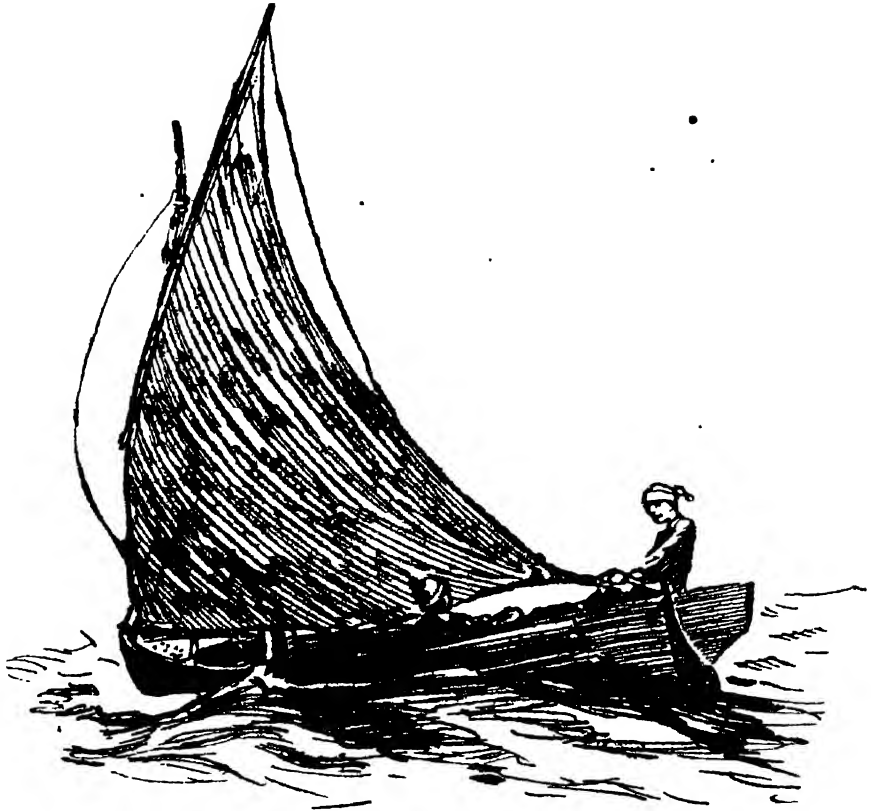
Going All Out

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The BOYS' BUDGET



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THE ISLE OF RED TERROR

By PERCY F. WESTERMAN

I

"Now, then, you lazy blighters! How about it? There's a boat at seven bells."

The rest of the mess received Arnesby's invitation without enthusiasm. Were it not for the fact that the mercury stood at 119 degrees in the shade, one might have recorded that the midshipman's suggestion was accepted in chilly silence.

Peter Arnesby eyed his fellow occupants of the gun-room with mingled sternness and reproach. Brimful with enthusiasm himself, he failed to understand the reluctance of the others to jump at the idea of spending a few hours of uninterrupted liberty ashore.

H.M.S. *Arcturus*, light cruiser on particular service, was lying at anchor off one of the groups of islands between the Java and South China Seas. A series of soundings had been taken prior to a report being sent to the Admiralty of the advisability or otherwise of forming a subsidiary coal and oil-fuel base. Hitherto little was known of Hua-tin-Koh, the name of the island, which in Indo-Chinese dialect meant "The Isle of Red Terror".

"What's doing?" inquired another midshipman plaintively. "Any cinema, tea-house, or any other old thing in that line?"

"Nothing doing, old son," replied Arnesby. "We may get a chance of shooting a pig or two."

He paused and regarded the apathetic features of the rest of the mess. Judging by what he saw the prospects he had held out were not sufficiently alluring.

"I heard the Pay and the Navigator talking about the island," he resumed truthfully, and forthwith, being gifted with a talented imagination, the midshipman drew largely upon sheer mendacity. "There's a whopping big treasure buried on the top of that hill. A couple of hundred years or more ago a Portuguese pirate did a roaring trade in that line. Fleeced homeward-bound China ships

right and left, and played Old Harry generally, until one of our frigates was sent to lay him by the heels. The Portuguese were driven ashore on this island, but before the landing-party could nab them the pirates vanished into the interior. The frigate's boats formed a cordon round the island, but not a trace could be found of either pirates or their booty."

"Did the pirates turn up again?" asked the Paymaster-midshipman, after taking a "long pull" at an iced lemon and soda.

"No," replied Arnesby. "They were properly done in, I imagine; but the treasure must be somewhere: tons of it. It's quite on the cards that the Navigator and Harcourt are going ashore to-morrow to have a prowling round, so how about it? It would be a topping rag to forestall them. If we do find the stuff it will be a feather in our caps. If we don't we can play a good joke on old Harcourt."

At the remote possibility of finding hidden treasure, and the concrete chance of being able to rag the none too popular Navigating-lieutenant, the midshipmen mustered up sufficient energy to "go on the beach", and, ten minutes later, the sub of the gun-room and half a dozen midshipmen, arrayed in shore-going kit and armed with double-barrelled sporting guns, crowded into the picket-boat.

The captain and the commander were pacing the quarter-deck as the boat prepared to cast off. The former nodded in reply to an observation from his subordinate, and "The Bloke" stepped to the head of the accommodation ladder.

"It will be a bright moonlight night," he called out, "so you need not return by sunset. A boat will be sent for you at six bells."

A cheer greeted this announcement, for the concession was a popular one. Lethargy was sinking to zero.

"They can't come to any harm, Mr. Tranner," observed the skipper. "They'll be all the better for working off a little superfluous steam."

Upon arriving at the shore the boat ran alongside a temporary pontoon that had been recently placed in position by the ship's company to facilitate landing operations. The coral reef surrounding the island made this an easy matter, for the lagoon was as placid as a mill-pond.

"I say," remarked Marline, as he scanned the frowning heights of volcanic rock, "looks a terrific way to the top. I'm quite content to lie down at the bottom and look up. I'll do even better than that. I'll shout encouragement to you fellows."

"You're coming, whether you like it or not, old son," said Whissendene, the sub of the gun-room. "You can carry the grub," he added, with magnificent condescension, "and if you scoff any before the proper time there'll be trouble, my lad."

Up the long gradual ascent the party toiled, until they arrived at the base of the actual ridge. The ground was well covered with scrub and promised plenty of sport, but that promise seemed to be lacking in fulfilment. Porkers were grunting in the brush-wood, but ne'er a one came within range of the guns.

"It seems to me that there are too many of us in a bunch," declared Arnesby. "I vote we move in extended order. We're bound to drive the pigs up against a wall in time. No porker could scale that cliff."

"Good wheeze, Peter," agreed the sub. "Now, you fellows, sort yourselves out in pairs. Marline and Gunter, you buzz off to the right; Kimber and Hardy, work round to the left. The others at ten minutes' interval. Arnesby and I will be the centre of direction. Now, off you go."

There was no option but to obey the order of the autocrat of the gun-room. The midshipmen trooped off, leaving Arnesby and the sub to themselves.

Whissendene consulted his watch.

"We've twenty minutes," he remarked. "Let's have a smoke," and he tendered a silver cigarette-case to his companion. "Wonder if we might happen to tumble up against the treasure?"

The midshipman offered no reply. It was not wise to be either too optimistic or pessimistic concerning a treasure that existed solely in his imagination.

"We'll have a chance of a shot now that those noisy blighters have gone," he observed. "I suppose it's fair sport? I'd rather take on something else than potting at pigs. D'ye remember that time we had up the Rufigi—that bush cow that nearly did in the First Luff?"

The Isle of Red Terror

"Some sport," agreed the sub. "No, I don't fancy we'll meet anything more formidable than a pig."

For some minutes the twain sat and smoked in silence. Then Whissendene looked once more at his watch.

"Time!" he ejaculated laconically.

The two chums, their sporting guns ready for instant use, pursued their way through the now steeply shelving scrub, treading with the caution of skilled sportsmen. At intervals sounds of their noisy comrades could be heard right and left, but not a shot rang out.

Twenty minutes steady up-hill work brought Arnesby and Whissendene face to face with a mass of rock that towered almost perpendicularly to a height of four hundred feet above the already lofty ground on which the two officers stood. Extending on both sides the rock presented the appearance of a gigantic and seemingly unclimbable wall.

"What have we struck, I wonder?" remarked the sub, regarding the frowning mass. "Tail end of the Great Wall of China, what?"

"It certainly looks like a gigantic piece of built masonry," replied the midshipman. "Bit of a puzzle: question is how are we to get to the top before the other fellows?"

"Push on round," suggested Whissendene. "We're bound to find a spot where we can shin up."

Examination showed that between the scrub and the wall a comparatively easy path existed. Evidently the pigs were in the habit of making use of the track, although the hardness of the ground prevented the officers observing the footprints.

"By Jove, we are up a height already," exclaimed Arnesby, pointing at the lagoon which resembled a miniature duck-pond, and on which the *Arcturus*, looking about the size of half a walnut shell, rode easily at her anchors. "Looks as if we could toss the proverbial biscuit on the old ship's quarter-deck."

For about a couple of hundred yards the two chums skirted the base of the natural barrier, until the midshipman called his companion's attention to the mouth of a cave which was partly concealed by trailing tendrils and half blocked by a mound of large stones.



The apes attack

"Strange," observed the sub. "That rubble has been disturbed fairly recently. I wonder— Look here, when we rejoin the others we'll all come back and explore. The Portuguese pirates' treasure, perhaps?"

"If it were hidden there it's gone now," declared Arnesby, who was beginning to get tired of the "treasure" stunt of which he was the sole author and exploiter. "Not much use fooling about in a dog's hole like that. If we don't look slippy the others will be at the rendezvous before us. Look out, by Jove!"

He raised his gun to his shoulder, as a dark figure started from behind a thorn bush and scrambled awkwardly towards a detached rock.

"Hold on!" exclaimed the sub. "Don't fire, man; it's a native."

The Isle of Red Terror

"But the island's uninhabited," protested the midshipman, as he slipped the safety-catch of his gun. "There are only pigs and pigs don't walk on their hind legs. Hang it all, Whissendene, it's an ape: the scrub's chock-a-block with them."

As if acting on a pre-arranged signal a crowd of huge simians appeared, chattering and gesticulating. Forming a compact semi-circle, of which the diameter was the unsurmountable cliff, they evinced a curiosity about the two men that was both unwelcome and disconcerting.

"Hanged if I can shoot 'em," declared the sub. "It's like plugging a human being. We'll carry on and see what happens."

The apes' expressions gave no indication of animosity or anger, but when the two men attempted to continue their way, the living barrier showed no sign of giving way.

Whissendene and his companion paused irresolutely.

"They may be harmless," continued the sub, "but I don't relish the idea of coming to close quarters. Reminds me of that play, *A Greek Slave*, in which is prescribed the mild punishment of being bitten in the tummy by wild monkeys."

"Can't we bribe them?" asked his companion, "or must we admit that we are frightened by a pack of apes? Let's fire over their heads."

Without waiting for the sub's verdict, Arnesby raised his gun and let loose a cartridge. Instantly the babel ceased. The animals, showing no signs of trepidation, looked at each other as if seeking mutual advice; then in obedience to a secret signal the whole mass advanced with ferocious cries and gestures that left no doubt in the officers' minds as to the apes' intentions.

"Let 'em have it as hard as you jolly well can," shouted the sub. "It's our only chance."

II

Levelling his twelve-bore, Whissendene fired both barrels into the brown, writhing mass of ferocious simians. Arnesby, stopping only to eject a still smoking cartridge and reload, followed suit.

Momentarily a section of the converging line of apes paused, the brutes eyeing those of their dead and wounded companions with every symptom of fear; but the rest of the swarm held on, some standing erect, others scrambling on all fours like hideous monsters.

Even as the midshipman reloaded, a sinewy paw grasped him by his gaitered ankle. Taken completely unawares, Arnesby was on the point of being jerked off his feet when the sub brought the muzzle of his gun within a few inches of the brute's ear and pressed the trigger; then swiftly turning he stopped the rush of another shrieking animal that was about to leap upon his shoulders.

"The cave!" shouted Whissendene, raising his voice above the hideous din. "It's our only chance."

Keeping close to the wall the chums let rip a diverging fire that had the effect of clearing a temporary path in the dusky horde. Full ten yards they retraced their way, then in a concerted rush a dozen of the largest apes flung themselves like a living avalanche upon the hard-pressed men.

Before the sub could reload he saw a powerful beast grip the muzzle of Arnesby's gun. Bringing the butt of his own gun down with terrific force upon the animal's head Whissendene settled that particular opponent; but the work had been done too effectively, for the weapon was shattered at the "small". The next instant three brutes threw themselves upon the useless gun and tore it from Whissendene's grasp.

Taking advantage of the diversion, for the apes appeared to regard the still smoking barrels as objects upon which to wreak their vengeance, the officers gained the mouth of the cave, stumbling backwards with more haste than dignity into the pitch-dark hole.

Springing to his feet the midshipman reloaded and fired point-blank at the glittering eyes of the now doubly infuriated animals. Baulked of their prey and chagrined to find that the captured trophy was inanimate, the simians were pressing the attack. Their fetid breath wafted into the cave and mingled with the acrid fumes of the powder as Arnesby fired cartridge after cartridge into the writhing, struggling press.

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At length the fury of the attack wore itself out. The apes, baffled at being unable to rush the cave by dint of numbers, resorted to strategy that was worthy of human ingenuity. Screening themselves by the bodies of their slain companions, they again advanced until they found that their improvised bucklers were not proof against a twelve-bore at three feet range.

"We've beaten them off, thank goodness," exclaimed the midshipman, wiping his heated face. "Now, what's to be done? Will the blighters clear off?"

"I doubt it, my son," replied the sub. "They'll sit tight. We ought to warn Marline and the rest of the fellows. Half a dozen shot guns aren't sufficient to rout the enemy. By Jove, I'm dry—and I told Marline off to carry the grub and fizz."

"Hope there's no back door to this show," remarked Arnesby grimly, glancing over his shoulder apprehensively. Their eyes grew accustomed to the gloom, and they became aware that light was filtering into the cave, which was of considerable height. "We don't want to be attacked front and rear. Think they've had enough?"

"No, I don't," answered his companion. "Listen. There's dirty work at the cross-roads."

It was not long before the latest tactics of their four-handed foes became apparent. Like so many demons from the underworld the apes were crouching, heaving and levering at a number of loose boulders that littered the approach to the cave. Amply protected they succeeded after half an hour of strenuous work in completely barricading the mouth of the cavern, while, judging by the noises from without, they were making additionally sure by banking up the rubble wall by earth, stones, and brushwood, the while chattering with fiendish glee.

"They've walled us up," declared Arnesby, stating an obvious fact.

"And we can't communicate and warn our pals," added the sub; "unless we find another way out, which means that the apes—confound 'em—have a way to get to us. How many cartridges?"

"Six."

"Take my little lot; eleven all told. By smoke, we're cutting things pretty fine if it comes to another scrap. I vote we explore. I've plenty of matches."

"Keep them till they're wanted," cautioned Arnesby. "There's light enough, though goodness only knows where it comes from. Lead on and let's get our bearings."

The floor of the cave was fairly level but in places ankle-deep in fine dust, unmarked by the tracks of either man or beast. Compared with the sweltering heat without the air was cold and dry.

Moving cautiously the chums traversed a distance of about twenty yards, when they both stood stock-still. Lying half buried in dust was the skeleton of a man, bone dry and white. Fragments of crumbling clothing still partly covered the bones.



"We're not the first"

The Isle of Red Terror

"We're not the first prisoners in this cave, then," said Whissendene gravely. "Look, there's another."

A short distance away was another skeleton; that of a big-framed man who had died while sitting propped against the wall. By his side lay a curiously fashioned flint-lock pistol and a tobacco pipe with a long stem and a small bowl after the seventeenth-century style. Beyond was a pile of rubble that had fallen from the roof, leaving exposed a perpendicular shaft through which the daylight filtered.

"No escape that way," declared the sub, throwing back his head and contemplating the chimney-like aperture. "That's where the light comes from, and I doubt whether the agilest ape could make its way down. We'll carry on and see what's doing."

Already the day had been a chain of surprising events, but the next discovery appeared to be the climax, for after surmounting the mound of debris the chums saw before them a number of metal-bound boxes, around and upon which skeletons were sprawling in every conceivable attitude. At least fifty men had lived and died in this cave of terror.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Whissendene, as he boldly approached the bone-guarded coffers. "We're in luck, Peter. We've struck the Portuguese pirates' treasure cave."

III

Dumbfounded at his companion's assertion, Peter Arnesby looked with wide open eyes at the glittering contents of the nearest chest.

"Whose treasure did you say?" he asked at length. The sub eyed him curiously.

"Dash it all man!" he exclaimed. "Are you wandering? You told us the yarn——"

"So I did," interrupted the midshipman. "That's the funny part about it. I remember I did—made it up, just to pull the other fellows' legs,

"What?" inquired Whissendene incredulously.

"Fact," was the emphatic reply. "It was true that I heard

the Pusser and the Navigating Luff talking about the island, but the yarn about the treasure was all moonshine."

"Doubt it, old bird," remarked the sub. "Here's evidence to the contrary. And we're walled in. I shouldn't be surprised if the ancestors of these apes did the same to the pirates. But the treasure can wait. We must find a way out."

It was easier said than done. Vainly they explored the cave to find a likely exit. There was none.

"Our only chance is to demolish the barrier," declared Whissendene. "If we set to work quietly we may do so without the brutes knowing. Wonder what the other fellows are doing?"

The sub had hardly voiced his interest in the rest of the landing-party when high above their heads someone shouted.

"Here, you fellows; I've found a terrific hole."

Looking up, the two imprisoned officers saw Marline's head craning over the edge of the natural chimney or shaft.

"We discovered it before you did, Shorty," shouted the sub. "Throw down some of the grub and then we'll let you into a secret."

"It's not playing the game," objected Marline. "Sending us to climb to the top while you two fool about in a cave."

"All the same," continued Whissendene, "chuck down some grub. Don't worry about the limejuice and soda just at present: we prefer to drink it rather than see the bottles smashed to smithereens. Now, you fellows, signal the ship and ask them to send an armed party ashore. A Maxim would be handy."

"What for?" asked Kimber.

The sub explained. It was some time before his hearers could be convinced that the whole thing was not a hoax.

An hour and a half later the captive officers heard the rattle of small arms and the rapid tat-tat-tat of a machine gun. For quite ten minutes the fusillade continued, and then ended suddenly.

"Time!" exclaimed the sub laconically, and working desperately the two chums heaved and tore at the wall of rubble. Blue-jackets without assisted in the work, and at length Whissendene and Arnesby were free. It was now dark.

"Treasure, eh?" exclaimed the first lieutenant, entering the cave and flashing an electric torch upon the mouldering coffers. "By smoke, yes. Well, it can wait for a few days. The mercury's falling like billy-ho. We're ordered to raise steam and quit the anchorage, so there's no time to be lost. Yes, we've settled the apes, but didn't they put up a fight. The Peking Legation business wasn't in it. All right, carry on."

IV

For three days the short-warned storm blew with terrific violence. The *Arcturus*, battened down, could barely hold her own as under forced draught she steamed dead in the eye of the wind.

On the fourth day the gale moderated, but another eighteen hours elapsed before the cruiser could return to the lagoon off Hua-tin-Koh.

"The island looks different to me," remarked the officer of the watch, as he lowered his telescope and wiped the lens.

The Navigating-lieutenant agreed. •

"It may be a trick of the atmosphere," he added.

Whissendene, who was on the fore-bridge, heard the conversation with undisguised apprehension. Bringing his telescope to bear upon the peak his doubts were confirmed. A volcanic disturbance had altered the entire face of the landscape, and where the cave had been there was nothing but an enormous pile of rubble. The whole of the peak had been affected by a landslide, and the debris almost extended to the edge of the lagoon.

"Hard lines," he exclaimed to Arnesby who stood beside him. "It's all UP with the pirates' treasure."

"'Fraid so," assented the midshipman gravely. "But, after all, our luck's in, for we might have been cooped up in the cave when the crash came. I don't wonder that the place is called the 'Isle of Red Terror'."

THE PACE-MAKER

By W. K. HOLMES

I

"It's a frightful pity, Morris, that you're such a mug at games. I know you haven't had much chance of playing before you came to Betterton, but the other chaps don't know that, and they must think you a bit of an ass."

"I'm very sorry, Vin. Perhaps after another term or two——"

"Oh, I daresay! But meantime, you see, you're awfully out of things. And it's a pity, because everybody knows we are friends and come from the same place."

"Don't you worry about me, Vin. My pater had funny ideas about games, but I don't inherit them, and he's given way to me now that I've come to Betterton, and I don't see why I shouldn't get into one of the teams before so awfully long. Meanwhile I want to do all the training I can."

"That's something, anyhow. Look here, I shall be running in the inter-house cross-country, of course. D'you care to come out with me for a jog or a few sprints now and then? You needn't do all I do, but anyhow it would do you good and get some of the softness off you."

Morris Walker permitted himself an almost invisible smile at that last remark, because, though he knew he wasn't the least use at games, he also knew that he was pretty hard. At home, Vincent Astbury and Morris Walker had been friends for long, ever since they had met as small boys—Morris a blue-eyed kid a couple of years younger than Vincent, and the pride of eccentric parents who were bringing him up in some extraordinary way which forbade games till he was fourteen years of age.

Vin was at Betterton School, one of its shining lights, in fact;

The Pace-maker

a prefect, and in the school Rugby team, and his house team—Findlater's House—for cricket. Also he was a very promising runner, and had already given the school champion a fright.

Morris thought him no end of a hero, and when Vincent was home on holiday followed him about like a dog, ran messages for him, believed everything he told him, and was pleased to be thoroughly patronized. All this Vincent loved, but when the younger boy came to school, a perfect greenhorn at everything in which the public schoolboy is supposed to excel, he sometimes wasn't so sure that it was good for his standing at Betterton to have his obscure young friend too much in his company.

However, to let him come out training with him couldn't do any harm; it would show the other fellows that Astbury was trying to do something to knock the kid into decent shape.

Morris turned out to be quite a good training partner. He surprised his friend. "Look here, Morris," said that great man to him one afternoon as they rubbed down after a two mile jog, "I think you'd better turn out and run for the house. Findlater's isn't any too strong this year, and you might by some fluke manage to get a place and keep out some kid in Weston's. They're the dangerous people this year."

"The first ten home count, don't they?" asked Morris.

"Yes; the winner counts 10 points, the second 9, and so on; and of course the winner gets the Gray-Hutton shield for a year, and has his name on it."

"Well, I think I'll run. Can't do any harm."

"That's the spirit. I'll tell you what; you can set a pace for me for the first couple of miles. You're quite good up to that distance, and if I can make Todd of Weston's go all out for that two miles I believe I should get him pumped and beat him. See? You and I will go all out at the start, and when we've got Todd and a few more well blown and their *moral* shaken, then you can drop out or plod on as you like, and I'll see what I can make of it, what? Got the idea?"

"That seems to be the stuff," said Morris, with a glowing face. "It would be great if you could get the shield, Vin. Your pater would be awfully bucked."



"You and I will go all out at the start"

II

The day of the race was an ideal one—far better than cross-country runners ever dare to hope for. There had been dry weather for a week, and even the surface of the ploughed fields was free from stickiness, while the meadows of short grass offered going that was simply perfect.

"Now don't be nervous, Merry," said Vincent, as together they jogged down to the starting-point." His own teeth were chattering, meanwhile, with the kind of excitement that seizes many men before such a test as a race. "Don't worry about anything, I'm doing the worrying for two, remember. All you've got to do is to get away and through the mob at the start before

The 'Pace-maker

they guess what we're after, and when once we're ahead, go like blazes for as long as you can. That'll pull me along, see? Then you can have a bit of a rest and I'll grind on alone."

"I'll do my best," Morris assured him. "I'm feeling pretty fit." He was also, it may be remarked, quite as calm as any spectator; as calm as the Head, Dr. Ashley, who was watching the muster, and a great deal calmer than Mr. Paton, who was to start them.

"For the third time, boys," cried he; "get into line. If I start you before you are in line you'll complain that you weren't ready. Right? Now then— You, boy! Smithson, *will* you get back? Must I penalize somebody?—Now—*will* those fellows stand back, please, and give the runners a chance? You aren't running yourselves, and you— All right then. I shall say 'Get Ready' and then fire the pistol."

The long row of boys—their light clothing plucked at by the cold wind, their eyes fixed ahead, staring towards the hedge a quarter of a mile away, which was the first obstacle and which would certainly begin the process of thinning out—stood tense and eager, every competitor strung for his effort.

Would the pistol never go and get this horrible moment over? Vincent stole a glance at the starter. Mr. Paton seemed to be contemplating, but with startling suddenness he woke up, said "Get ready" and pulled the trigger almost simultaneously.

A ghastly instant, that, for the high-strung runner! Everybody seems to have got a better start than he; there seems no room to put his feet, no room to swing his elbows; everybody seems to be making a perfectly impossible pace as though this were a 220-yard burst instead of a five- or six-mile grind!

With the crack of the pistol, however, Vincent's excitement was forgotten. A practised athlete and in perfect condition, he had himself in hand at once. He knew what he wanted to do, and this frantic burst of speed that the mob was making wouldn't last—it couldn't last even to the hedge. The reason of it was, of course, that there were only a few good gaps in that hedge, and therefore it would act as a strainer of the field. The fellows who had to wait for a chance at a gap, or who had to delay to

scramble through where there was no gap, would lose a lot of ground. So what was wanted was judgment—one must reach a gap well to the fore, but at the same time one must not kill one's chances with a frantic rush to that hedge.

Where was Morris? Vincent wondered, but was not foolish enough to look round for him. He had been well drilled in his part; he knew the need to be in the first flight when the hedge was reached; if he overdid the thing—as a novice was likely to do—and simply pumped himself before getting there, well then, the plan of campaign would collapse.

Their places at the start had not been side by side, as the competitors were lined up alphabetically, but the arrangement was that Morris should do his best to get alongside his friend when that dreaded and fateful hedge was passed.

Vincent reached the best gap of all amongst the first three, one of whom was his rival of Weston's House, little wiry, black-haired Todd, whom it seemed impossible to beat in stamina or running craft. The thought that flashed through Vincent Astbury's head as he noticed Todd at his elbow was: "You look cool now, you beggar, because you think the pace is just going to drop as usual here, but it isn't, my hearty."

Almost abreast, the three, Vincent, Todd, and a Scot named Elliott, tall and muscular, and a known sticker, dropped down into the great rolling grass meadow beyond the famous hedge, and in another moment Vincent was aware of a fourth figure drawing up on his right. The corner of his eye told him it was his young ally, and he spared wind enough to say: "Good man; that's the stuff." And so they settled down to run.

The pace was absurd. Big Elliott showed what he thought of it by letting the other three go on, while he swung into his own raking stride, calculated to pull in any hot-headed runner who forgot the miles ahead and lavished his energies on the first two. Todd stuck it; deep in his heart there was a feeling of pity for those two fellows of Findlater's—Astbury and the new kid. Astbury was probably being drawn into this folly by that youngster who would drop out in a few minutes; Astbury might surely have known better. This kind of thing was apt to spoil a good race,

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because in spite of your better judgment you couldn't let anybody get too far ahead.

Vincent was delighted.. "This young beggar can sprint." was what he was thinking. "I wonder how long he'll keep it up? This pace must be thinning the field pretty well, anyhow. Wish I knew what Todd was thinking."

Over a wire fence they rushed in line, Elliott just a few yards astern, Todd moving like a neat machine, Vincent fairly settled down and rejoicing, Morris flushed and determined, and with a long light step that served him well over the stubble field across which lay the next stretch of the track.

In spite of every effort, the first wild speed had dropped a little, and by the time the leaders raced through the open gate at the far end of the stubble, and took to the lane there, one or two determined characters were pulling them in a little. Elliott was making up what he had lost, Todd looked perfectly at ease. Pounding down the lane, Vincent spoke a word to Morris. "Mustn't drop it yet. Make another burst."

"Right—in the plough," Morris responded through set teeth.

A hundred yards farther on the trail took them through another gate into an enormous ploughed field that sloped gently up and up to a little fringe of trees. By the time those trees were reached the runners would have covered more than two miles—almost half the complete journey. Morris, obedient to orders, made another burst for the sake of his friend and of Findlater's House, as soon as they turned into that expanse of brown furrows. He fled up towards the bare trees on its horizon as though it were easier to run uphill than down, as though the soft earth handicapped him not at all. The ardent ones who had crept up from the ruck slipped back again; Elliott's weight checked him; Todd the machine seemed to labour a little, and even Vincent had plainly "bellows to mend", though stride for stride he stuck to his pace-maker.

As they crashed through the wood and took to the highway beyond, Vincent thought to himself: "I guess the kid will chuck it now. He's a runner, though."

But Morris didn't chuck it; with a fleeting smile at his friend

as though claiming approval, he pelted along the hard road; for nearly a mile that was their track, and when again they took to the fields there was no more than a mile and a half to the finish.

By the time this was reduced to a mile Elliott was disposed of, Todd evidently beginning to use his reserves, Vincent wondering if he had been in such good training as he *believed*—and also thoroughly astonished at his young friend.

Then came his disaster—slight in itself, but catastrophic in the circumstances. As they jumped a little wet ditch—the Findlater pair neck and neck, Todd a couple of yards ahead, Elliott a dozen paces astern—Vincent took off badly, his foot slipping on a patch of clay; he stumbled, and instead of clearing the ditch splashed into it and had to scramble out, giving Todd the chance seriously to increase his lead. Wet shoes are a handicap severe enough to a tired man running against another in dry ones. Vincent knew it, and realized that the struggle home was going to be a grim one for him, a forlorn hope, and that in spite of all his training, in spite of the skilful use of his pacer, it was extremely doubtful if his name would yet appear on that silver shield. These thoughts flashed through his mind as he scrambled out of the mud and got back into his interrupted stride, and simultaneously, he realized that that astonishing young Morris had dropped back beside him. Poor old Findlater's!

"Are you done?" he gasped, as they pelted on.

"No, feeling first-rate," was the startling response.

"Then why on earth did you slack up?"

"You—you fell in."

"Go *on*, you priceless ass, go *on*! Never mind me, you owl; hang on to Todd!"

"But, Vin——"

"Run, you idiot! Run for Findlater's—you frightful ass, run!"

Morris ran. The passing of these remarks must have lost the pair a fraction of a second, and Todd was not the man to neglect anything an opponent gave away. Nearly twenty yards ahead he was streaking for home—for the school gates, now not so far away. Morris was utterly bewildered with one part of his brain—he

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was leaving Vin behind, Vin, to help whom he had run this punishing race; there was nobody in front of him but last year's winner, now obviously in trouble and running on his will power. That was plain in his every stride. The other half of Morris's brain was calm enough. It was in command of his legs, and discussing the best way to pass the swiftly moving figure ahead. Todd was a trained and practised runner; weary he might be, but he was full of grit, up to every clever move for defeating a presumptuous rival who might think to snatch a victory from him by luck. But if Todd was all this, Morris—as Betterton School and his University were by and by to recognize—was a born long-distance champion. He felt in his bones that, tired as Todd might be, he would always have something up his sleeve for a finish, and that it would not do to trust to beating him with a desperate sprint at the end. He must be fought and beaten before the home straight began—he must be fought and beaten now!

Morris drove his limbs yet faster. The champion heard his footsteps nearer, nearer, nearer, and responding to the challenge shook him off—or thought he did. But no: Todd's desperate effort must be followed by another, by another yet, by successive efforts, by a burst of fresh speed maintained to the winning tape.

Twice, thrice, he was sure he had renewed the gap between himself and the fellow behind—Astbury, he thought, running like a deer. His fourth effort was his last; his rival held him, drew up to him, passed him. Even then Todd fought like the gallant runner he was, counting on the tendency some men have to relax when they have dropped another behind; but this slim fellow was too clever to be caught out like that. Both going like steam, their last ounce used up, Walker and Todd of Weston's strove to the last yard, but it was Morris Walker of Findlater's who finished first.

“Did you think I was such a sweep as to want you to wait for me?” was what Vincent said to him later. “Like the kind of chap who can't bear to be beaten? By Jove, Morry, you've a lot to learn—but not about running!”

SOFT SOAP

BY S. T. JAMES

Externally, the Head Offices of the Great British Railway Police were far from imposing. They were reached from the main arrival platform of Almondby Station, and consisted of a suite of rooms on the second floor.

It was late, and most of the staff were gone, but at the foot of the stairway stood Harry Stacey, one of the juniors. Stacey was just seventeen, short and sturdy in build, with freckled face and dark, curly hair. By his side were two big leather bags, and in his hands he held a copy of an evening newspaper, whose glaring headlines announced the escape from prison of a notorious safe-breaker. "Scotland Yard have a clue, and are following it energetically!" the sheet announced, and Harry smiled a little. Inner experience of police methods had taught him that such statements were usually eyewash.

It was not the Bowerberry safe-breaker that claimed Harry's chief interest, however. In an adjoining column of the paper were details of a railway robbery, wherein the baggage of a prominent M.P. had been rifled, and valuables to the extent of nearly £200 taken. "This makes the tenth similar outrage inside six months," the report recalled. "So far, the railway police have proved absolutely impotent, and it is time that Scotland Yard was consulted. Scotland Yard would surely pick up a clue!"

"They always do!" Harry agreed, sarcastically, recalling the Bowerberry safe-breaker.

Coming downstairs was Donald Campbell, Superintendent of the Great British Railway Police. He was an elderly man, with snowy hair and wrinkled face. Firm lips and kindly eyes gave the impression of a man safely to be trusted, and his staff did more than trust him—they adored him.

"Only five minutes to train time, sir!" Harry said, answering

the Superintendent's greeting. "I'm starting my holidays to-night, to get in an extra week-end."

"Everyone to his taste, I suppose!" the Superintendent agreed, smiling. "You'll look well after your baggage during the journey?"

"Like anything!" Harry answered grimly. "He'll be a clever crook who takes it from me!"

"Just now we are operating against a crook who is more than usually clever," Campbell warned. "For months he has defied all our efforts. You have seen to-night's newspaper?"

"I was just reading it, sir!" Harry agreed, sympathetically. "The fellow seems almost superhuman."

"There are hundreds of trains running every day, and our detectives cannot possibly patrol them all," Campbell explained. "The reputation of the line is suffering, I'm afraid."

Harry nodded. He had heard something of the letters poured in by angry passengers, and knew that not only was the reputation of the line suffering, but also the reputation of the Police Superintendent. And that was unfair, for the worth and efficiency of Donald Campbell were never even questioned by those who knew him.

"I'd give a good deal to see the fellow safely under lock and key!" Campbell owned, ruefully. "We shall get him sooner or later, I suppose; all thieves trip up some time. The fellow's chief asset seems to be a persuasive tongue; at any rate he understands the use of soft soap as applied to credulous passengers. Don't let him add insult to injury by stealing the baggage of one of my personal staff, will you?"

"No fear, sir!" Harry repeated, and then, hearing the rumble of a train entering the opposite platform, he lifted the two bags and called out a breathless good night. Turning hurriedly toward the subway, he collided with a powerful-looking, well-dressed stranger standing beside the bookstall.

"Careful, sonny!" the big man gasped, caressing his ribs.

"Sorry—no idea you were so close!" Harry jerked.

"I would have warned you had I guessed you would turn so sharply," Donald Campbell said.

Satisfied that no serious damage was done, Harry ran along the subway to join his train, and mindful of Campbell's warning, he packed his bags upon the rack and sat down facing them. As he did so, he felt something hard and bulky inside his coat pocket, and remembered the parting gift of an adoring small sister. Drawing out the package, he surveyed for the twentieth time an assortment of three tablets of American-made fancy toilet soap. One tablet he slipped back to his pocket; then, lifting down the smaller of his two bags, he stowed away the other tablets. One was a very passable imitation of a Ford motor-car, and the other resembled an orange. In shape, colour and proportion, both were perfect models.

"Cleverly made, sonny!" said a voice close at Harry's elbow, and the boy turned to see the powerful looking stranger making himself comfortable in the opposite corner seat.

"In America, they manufacture soap models of almost everything one can mention," the newcomer continued. "Fruits, tools, buildings, animals, foods, weapons——"

The sound of the guard's whistle and with a long, steady heave the express recommenced her journey to the North.

It had been an oppressively hot day, and the cool evening air was very grateful. Having scanned the late-news column for final tidings of the mysterious rail robber, Harry threw aside the newspaper and lowered the nearest window.

"Without plenty of fresh air, railway travel is purgatory, such weather as this," the stranger commented.

"Rather!" Harry agreed, heartily.

"Particularly if the journey is long or lonely," added the stranger. "For myself, I am not proceeding very far to-night. You, I observe, are less fortunate."

Harry looked up in surprise, and the stranger smiled. "Your luggage is on the rack, with the labels face outwards," he explained. "Still, Scarborough is a delightful resort, and the journey will prove well worth while!

"For my own part, holidays are out of the question just at present," he continued, leaning back upon the cushions. "It is business of a most urgent kind that takes me North to-night."

Again he paused, evidently hoping for an invitation to proceed. His eyes were fixed upon the headlines of the discarded newspaper.

From an inner pocket he produced a card-case, passing to Harry a pasteboard slip, bearing the name, "Colonel Wane", whilst in the bottom left-hand corner were the significant words, "C.I.D., Scotland Yard".

"Your name I already know from your baggage," continued the Colonel, with a smile. "I am beginning to count myself exceedingly fortunate in meeting you to-night. If willing, you can do me a great personal favour, incidentally assisting in bringing to justice one of the greatest scoundrels unhung!"

"Indeed?"

"I am tracking down Reuben Shingler, the Bowerberry safe-breaker!" confessed the Colonel, sinking his voice to a confidential whisper. "He is a desperate character, and the sooner we lay him by the heels the better for the peace of the country. From information received, we suspect he can be found in Belton Wood—an outlandish place miles from the nearest railway station. He is meeting a confederate there at ten o'clock. At first we planned to ambush him, but eventually it was decided he might slip our fingers in the dark. So the Chief sent me down post haste, expecting me to tackle and capture the pair single-handed. Without boasting, I have successfully accomplished many tasks of greater difficulty, and I did not anticipate the slightest trouble to-night. But in hurrying to catch the train I twisted my ankle, and it is growing painful. Such a handicap is serious, and there is neither time nor opportunity to obtain official assistance. If I can persuade you to forgo a few hours of your holiday we can tackle the job together, without the slightest risk of failure!"

The Colonel's face wore a serious and anxious expression. "Were I to fail, it would be a serious blow to my reputation at the Yard, and your help to-night would be a very great personal favour. I am not the man to forget such favours!"

"Shingler is the man who injured a warder and got away, isn't he?" suggested Stacey.

"Precisely!" agreed the Colonel. "I do not hide from you

that there is some little personal risk," he added craftily, "and if you are afraid, of course, you need not come."

"I shall most certainly come!" interrupted Harry, flushing. "My luggage must take its chance, I suppose?"

"Being fully addressed, it will go forward safely enough, and to-morrow you can pick it up at Starborough," said the Colonel. "Now listen carefully, for we have very little time left. This train does not stop within ten miles of Belton, and there is no alternative but to make use of the communication cord. Do you know sufficient of the local geography to pull the cord when we reach Belton?"

"I know the line fairly well," Harry agreed, cautiously. "Just now we are close to Butterly. Soon we pass through Woodville Junction, and after that we shall need to study the landmarks."

Colonel Wane heaved a sigh of relief. "I am doubly fortunate in having met you," he said. "Myself, I am not any too happy with railway geography, and a mistake might easily ruin the whole enterprise. If you just pass me word when to pull the chain, I'll do it myself."

"We have about four minutes to go," Harry said. He was breathing rather fast from excitement, and his hand, jammed into a coat pocket, was clenching and unclenching in nervous agitation round the third tablet of American fancy soap lying there. "We cross a short viaduct, I think; then in about half a mile comes Belton."

"You know a good deal about the district, sonny?"

"In the railway police, we are always travelling, and this is our main line," Harry explained curtly. "His face was pressed flat against the window and he peered through intently. "To know the geography of our main line is essential, isn't it?"

"Probably!" The Scotland Yard man's tone was a trifle less confident than before. "Anyway——"

Came a hollow rumbling of wheels as the train tore over a short viaduct, and then in obedience to Harry's signal Colonel Wane took hold of the chain and pulled it firmly downwards.

"As soon as she slows, climb to the footboard, re-close the



A risky jump

compartment door and jump!" he urged, galvanized to new life. "We must get away before the guard comes along, or it will mean explanations that we simply haven't time to give. In the darkness, we shall never be seen, if we are prompt!"

Smiling grimly, Harry nodded, and a minute later a shiver ran through the train, followed shortly by a harsher, grating noise. Then she slackened speed appreciably, and Harry opened the compartment door, following the Colonel to the footboard.

The speed was still uncomfortably high, and the rush of air almost caused them to lose their footing. But they clung grimly to the ice-cold handles, and presently were able to grasp the wide swinging door and close it.

Alongside the permanent way was a grassy slope; and, as the train screamed toward a standstill, Harry half-turned so as to face the engine. "Stand like this and jump with bended knees!"

he shouted in the Colonel's ear. A moment later they were sorting themselves from an enormous bed of stinging nettles.

"Hurt?" questioned Harry, grimacing with pain. The Colonel's answer was unprintable, but he led the way toward a convenient hedge. "We must hide for a minute. They are almost sure to search!" he gasped.

Crouching, they watched the flitting lights of lanterns moving from carriage to carriage of the stationary train. Figures passed to and fro in the gloom, and there was a confused buzz from many voices. Then the carriage doors were slammed fast, and the express moved slowly forward.

"Failing to find a reason for the stoppage, they resumed their journey," chuckled the Colonel. "Now we must hurry ourselves."

They struggled across several muddy fields toward a distant high road, eventually striking a footpath and a stile. Faint and far away a clock struck half-past nine.

"Not much farther now!" said the Colonel. "The main road skirts the wood."

Again they hurried on, and in the darkness Harry found himself hard pressed to retain a sense of direction, though Colonel Wane seemed remarkably at home in view of the haziness of his previous notions.

"Seems to me we are moving in a circle," Harry said, breaking into a long silence. His fingers were still playing around his tablet of soap in uncontrollable agitation.

Suddenly the Colonel began to chuckle—deep throaty chuckles that nevertheless held a malevolent note. His unholy mirth became almost uncontrollable, and he sat down on the grass to laugh aloud.

"I'd give a good deal to see the fellow safely under lock and key!" he said at length, mimicking the tones of the Police Superintendent. "Up to now he has proved too clever for us. He has a persuasive tongue and understands quite well the use of soft soap as applied to credulous passengers. Don't let him add insult to injury by stealing the baggage of one of my personal staff!"

For several seconds, Harry stood frozen in his tracks.

"You heard, then?" he demanded.

Soft Soap

"Considering how close I was, is it surprising?" the Colonel retorted. "By now, a trusty partner of mine will be taking care of your luggage, and you'll never see it again, sonny. The joke is against you to-night, eh? Nothing like a little soft soap, is there?"

"Nothing!" Harry echoed. There raced through his mind a vision of the ridicule and opprobrium to be brought upon the Railway Police, and a wave of indignation flooded him.

"Nothing!" he repeated savagely. "Put up your hands—high!"

The mirth faded from the train robber's face, as if wiped with a cloth.

"Blazes!" he snarled, glimpsing in the moonlight something blue and shining, with the barrel pointed unwaveringly at his head. "Heeled, by Jove!" Automatically, his hands shot upwards.

"You overheard our talk, you say—so think out the rest of it as we move along!"

"All thieves trip up sometimes—eh? It's your turn now, my friend!" Harry said. "You'll march toward the main road—it lies just beyond the next field. And keep your hands up if you value your life. Probably they'll ache a bit before we meet a policeman."

Muttering savagely, the train-thief obeyed. There was a long way to go yet, he reflected; this was a very lonely and isolated district.

The same thought was in Harry's mind, vaguely disquieting, and until they reached the main road never a word was uttered. Then the Colonel broke silence, speaking in his most persuasive tone.

"Look here, sonny, I'll give you best, if you like!" he suggested. "It's a physical impossibility for me to keep my hands up for ever, you know. I'll give you my word——"

"You've given me all the soft soap I'm taking to-night," Harry interrupted. His voice was curt, but at the mention of soft soap, his pistol hand shook. "March right forward, and hurry, please!"

A finger-post, newly painted, and just visible in the moon-

light, showed that the nearest village was Rhodesia, one and a half miles distant. There was a railway station at Rhodesia, Harry remembered, and probably a police station too.

The road shone white in the moonlight, clearly deserted; faintly there came through the night air a shrill whistle from some distant train, and the faint rumble of its passing.

"I'm through!" the train-thief announced, curtly. "Shoot me if you must, but I can't keep my hands up any longer!"

There was desperation in his voice this time, and Harry knew that he spoke the truth.

The upraised hands were dropped long before permission came, and the thief turned round to face his captor. In his eyes dawning suspicion showed, growing rapidly to certainty.

"Well?" he demanded slowly. "Why don't you shoot me, eh?"



"March right forward!"

"Turn round again and go ahead, quick!" Harry urged, pointing his weapon steadily.

For a moment doubt showed in the captive's face, but it was gone instantly, replaced by a cold fury, terrible in its intensity.

"Curse you!" he snarled. "A bluff—a bluff!" Like lightning he grabbed at the pistol hand, and felt something soft, sticky, and scented.

"Curse you!" he repeated. "Soft soap!"

"American fancy toilet soap!" Harry corrected, unable to repress a thrill of triumph. "They make all sorts of soap models in America, don't they?"

From the direction of Rhodesia the silence of the lonely road was broken by the rattle of hoofs and wheels. As the train-thief's head turned for a fleeting glimpse of the approaching conveyance, Harry sprang in, tackling low, as he had learned on the Rugby field. The pair of them hit the road, hard, but Harry was uppermost. Ordinarily he was no match for such a powerful opponent, but just now the crook's arm muscles were aching almost to the point of paralysis.

As the combatants thrashed the ground in their savage struggle, Harry sent out yell after yell, and heard an answering shout from the dog-cart. Thrice his head hit the road, but his stiffening fingers clung grimly to their grip. He was dimly conscious that the dog-cart had stopped—there came a rush of feet, a string of curses from the thief as he made a last unavailing effort to escape. Then came a familiar voice, cool, triumphant, reassuring.

"Good work, Harry!" it said. "We've taken them red-handed, thanks to you!"

Looking up, Harry saw the genial, smiling face of Donald Campbell, Superintendent of the Great British Railway Police. Behind him were two sturdy railway porters from Rhodesia station, holding fast to their newly made and badly battered captive.

"I noticed him listening to our talk outside the office at Almondby," Donald Campbell explained, quietly. "I kept him under observation, and saw him follow you into the train, first speaking to a confederate. Then I transferred my attention to

this second fellow, and when the chain was pulled near Belton, he raced along the corridor toward your compartment to take possession of your baggage, affixing fresh labels of his own that he held in readiness. When the guard came along to inquire who pulled the chain and why, he calmly explained that he himself had just returned from the lavatory, the chain having been pulled in his absence by two fellow travellers who were now missing. I saw through the whole game then, but I wanted to round off the case beyond all shadow of doubt, so I waited a little longer. When the train re-started, he opened your bags and began to pocket the more valuable and portable articles. The guard and I caught him in the act, and now he is in custody at Rhodesia station, where I had a special stoppage made. He told us that you were to be stranded somewhere in the vicinity of Belton Wood, so we hired a trap and set out to look for you!"

Briefly Harry recounted his own adventures.

"From the very first moment I suspected a trap!" he finished, quietly. "Even the false visiting-card was a failure. Like you, I let him go ahead so as to get a case against him."

"You swanking little liar!" the train-thief said, crimson with rage and mortification. "Why, you rose to my bait like a hungry fish, and until I told you, there was never a doubt in your mind!"

Slowly a grin spread across Harry's battered face.

"In the train I saw you looking at the newspaper headlines!" he owned. "It was a clever idea, too, but you hadn't seen the stop-press news, old chap, and that was where you came to grief! The Bowerberry safe-breaker was recaptured shortly before five o'clock this afternoon!"

Donald Campbell was laughing openly. "You scored all along the line, Harry!" he owned, but the boy scarcely heard him.

He was moving slowly along the road, his eyes bent upon the ground, and finally, with a little grunt of satisfaction, he pounced upon a shapeless, pulpy, sticky mass lying there

"A soap revolver!" he explained regretfully. "It is absolutely spoiled, I'm afraid, but at first it was a lovely imitation!"

LITTLE TOTO

By J. D. WESTWOOD

Little Toto was about the last thing in dogs. If you were to take a handful of sheep's wool, roll it into a ball, and drop it on the floor beside Toto, you wouldn't know which was which. Anyway, that is what the Major said, and it shows that he hadn't a very high opinion of Toto. But we can't all be retrievers.

There were Buster and Old Bill, now, big strapping dogs both of them, but running to fat. Gun dogs they called themselves, but all they were really good for was catching kidney toast. If you threw a piece of kidney toast in the air, or anything else worth eating for that matter, they had it with a smack like a burst tyre. Just one snap, like that, and the thing was gone. At breakfast time, when the lean hunters were stamping and jangling their bits on the gravel outside, Buster and Old Bill would sit smiling on the hearthrug—smiling superior, if you know what I mean, as if the last thing on earth they were thinking of was kidney toast. And they filled in their odd moments saying amusing things about better dogs than themselves.

Oh, they *were* a pair of profiteers, those two! They really had no mind above kidney toast, and when the hounds went away full of music—from the bay window one could see them taking the green slopes like the crest of a wave—they were content to waddle off round the stable yard poking their noses into other people's business. *They* didn't hear the hunt calling. *Their* great souls never suffered in agony to be up and doing. Not they!

It wasn't like that with Toto. If he himself was no bigger than a boxing glove, his soul was a tight fit. It tingled to let those overfed retrievers know what was what. He had never forgotten that day when he fell out of a first floor window and got caught up by his long hair in one of those climbing rose bushes—the ones with the little red clumps of roses, you know. Rather pretty, but simply bristling with thorns. And do you think either of those two thankless brutes would lift a paw to help when they



They sat down and roared with laughter

found him dangling up there? Not a bit of it. They sat down below slapping their tails on the gravel, and roared with laughter. Old Bill said it was a last year's nest, and when Toto wriggled about and yelped "Not a nest—I'm-a-dog, I'm-a-dog, I'm-a-dog!" Old Bill rolled kicking into the herbaceous border, and Buster did his best to stand on his head, and shouted, "So *that's* where the stable mop went to!"

"Not-a-mop, not-a-mop," shrieked Toto. He was struggling frantically, and beside himself with rage. "I'm-a-dog, I'm-a-dog, I'm-a-dog!"

"Well," panted Old Bill, getting off his beam ends, "It's the first time *I* ever saw a chrysanthemum growing on a rose tree. Rotten sort of chrysanthemum too—all curling up and getting yellow at the edges."

Little Toto

The gardener got him down with a rake when he came to straighten out the gravel, but it was no thanks to Old Bill and his precious pal. They slunk off quietly the moment they saw the gardener coming. They knew there would be words over that herbaceous border.

You'll admit that sort of thing takes a bit of getting over. Toto felt sore about it for weeks, and he was out to get a bit of his own back with the very first opportunity.

He didn't quite see how it was to be managed at first. He tried joining the hunt, but hadn't much of a look in there. Ranter told him to get out of the way more than once, and Toto saw pretty plainly that it would have to be an affair of brains, not mere brawn.

"My dear good ass," Old Bill said, superior-like, "what earthly good d'you think you can do blowing along like a dandelion puffball in the wind a mile or so behind the pack? Take my advice and give it up. Nature never intended you for a hound."

That sort of thing was pretty galling. There's no getting away from that. And if brains were called for, Toto was the dog for your money. Toto was the brain merchant. What Old Bill said about following the hounds was all very well in its way, but why *follow* them? Why not go ahead of them?

That is the sort of idea that never would have occurred to Old Bill. It took brains to think of that, and one day—a fine hunting morning with a breast-high scent—a most amazing thing happened. After the finest run of the season—a run that strewed the face of nature with lost hats and wet, riderless horses, the hounds killed about eight miles from home. And when the huntsman lifted the fox arm-high—old Lady Bedlam on that liver chestnut she bought from the Duke had come in for the brush—why, there *was* no brush. The fox had none, and otherwise he was a fox in a thousand.

It was rough on old Lady Bedlam, after a run like that, but it ~~was~~ was no use her looking round the pack the way she did. *They* hadn't eaten it.

"What's the good of a fox without a tail?" she snapped, as

if the huntsman could help it. "It's only half a fox. You might as well have a church without a parson."

"Like hunting the jolly old Manx cat," put in the Duke.

"Or Toto," growled the Major.

Which was just exactly where the Major went wrong. And this is where you come to the amazing bit. After all, there's nothing very amazing about a fox without a tail. The King of Spain himself once found a fox's brush between the lines on a railway track. It was on a Sunday, and it shows that old Lady Bedlam was probably not the only one to be let down by a rudderless fox.

Well, the hunt was on its way home, shambling back in a straight line the way it had come, over exactly the same ground, because the road went round a long way. And a long, tired string they looked, heads and tails down, tongues hanging out, horses stumbling over early daisies, saddles grown as hard as dog biscuits, and all the rest of it. It was when they came staggering up the rise to the spinney, where the twisted old weather-blown line of hawthorns shows how a hedge must have grown there in the time of Canute, that they found a big, fierce iron trap with the teeth shut savagely like the jaws of an alligator. There were tufts of red hair sticking between the teeth, but there was no brush to be seen.

The huntsman had a lot to say about that trap. It might have nailed one of the hounds, or brought down a horse, and he knew who had put it there but wouldn't tell—not yet.

Then the hounds suddenly gave tongue and away, and old Lady Bedlam was over the ditch, and riding like a red Indian with the field streaming out on tired mounts behind. The Duke was afterwards heard to say he was a fool ever to part with that liver chestnut.

The way it happened was this. Toto had left Old Bill and his pal gossiping as usual, and gone off to a high bit of ground from which you could see what was going on. He could hear the pack baying a mile away, as if they had got on to a good thing, and then he saw Reynard himself come slinking up the near side of a post and rails.

Toto promptly went after him, doing his level best to bay like

an entire pack. It was a shrill sort of squeak, but it got a move on Reynard, who was afraid the hounds would hear, and away they went towards the spinney where the hawthorns are. And Toto's shriek became shriller and more piercing every moment.

When Reynard came to the spinney, he stopped and turned. They were well in the shade of the hawthorns.

"Well, young fella-me-lad," he panted with his tongue hanging out, "you look as if you were enjoying yourself, though I can't see what you want to come trailing after me for. If you're hunting for trouble why not look up someone your own size?"

Toto stopped squeaking and sat down.

"That's better," said Reynard. "For a pup of your inches you take rather an out size in voices. Better keep it in or those hounds will hear you and wonder what's the matter. Look at them—*just look* at them!"

There were the hounds three fields away, sterns up and waving, but very much at fault.

"If old Bellman had been there," went on Reynard, "they wouldn't be smelling up the wrong side of that hedge. Wonderful fellow to stick to a scent, Bellman. Best pup they ever had in the pack—knew him very well in the old days. Well, he's gone, poor old chap, and taken his nose with him, so we needn't fuss with that lot down there. They won't be here for a long time yet, and we might just as well sit down."

He looked round for a soft place and sat down, and before you could shout "Hark for'ard!" there was a wicked clang behind him, a yelp of pained surprise, and Reynard was off like a streak of red lightning. His tail was off too. It was lying in the trap right under Toto's nose; the most astonishing bit of luck! Reynard seemed to have lost his head completely, and Toto saw him, looking very strange and ill-balanced behind, streak straight across within full view of the hounds. Then he saw the huntsman capping them forward, and the music started again.

That was another bit of luck for Toto. Reynard might say what he liked about the pack. It was true they hadn't old Bellman any longer, but Ranter was a fairly sound thing as hounds go, and the mere thought of Ranter getting on the scent of that

brush gave Toto the fright of his life—especially if Ranter got him walking off with it. He had seen Ranter breaking up a fox before now, and the thought of it sent him bounding down that hill like a rubber ball. But he hung on to the brush, and when he pushed himself through the gap under the yard gates he was still hanging on to it.

You should have seen Buster and Old Bill when Toto strolled in with the brush. They were sitting beside a couple of steaming dishes waiting for their dinner to cool down.

“Great marrow-bones!” shouted Buster. “Where did you get it, Toto?”

Toto laid the brush on one side as if it were the most ordinary thing in the world, and scratched his ear.

“Bit it off,” he said—superior-like. Then he sniffed the steam. “Cook seems to have done you rather well to-day. My word, fox hunting does give one an edge!”

“Tell us about it,” asked Old Bill invitingly. “Who bit it off?”

“Why, who do you think?” asked Toto. “The nearest hound was a mile off looking for last year’s nests in the hedges, and I got him to myself for five minutes—the Old ’Un himself. Quite long enough too. If you don’t believe me, look at that brush for yourselves—you could pick up that white tip a thousand yards away. Look at it. Don’t be afraid. It won’t bite you.”

Buster and Old Bill came slowly forward as Toto edged up to the cooling dinner. They sat gazing at the brush in a melancholy way. It was the Old ’Un’s rudder right enough. Toto was not a quiet eater. They heard him appreciating the lushest items of a fairly succulent meal, and looked round at him. But that was as far as they got. They hadn’t a word to say for themselves. Never, thought they, had Toto spoken a truer word than when he said fox hunting put an edge on one’s appetite.

It was Old Bill who broke the silence first, and he did it with a respect that took Toto’s breath away.

“You’re bulging like a balloon tyre already, Toto,” he remarked. “When you really can’t get down any more of my dinner perhaps you wouldn’t mind giving me first refusal of what’s left.”



Over the brush stood the gallant Toto

"I feel," said Buster sadly, "as though I should never eat again."

"Not if little Toto stays on!" Old Bill told him. "There are one or two corners behind his ears which he hasn't filled in yet."

Toto saw it was time to interfere. So he looked up and said sternly:

"I don't want quite so much chin music from you two. Is this a little bit of liver I see here? My word, Buster, Cook *has* done you proud to-day! I should be sorry to have missed that bit of liver."

When a dog like Toto has chased an old dog-fox single-handed, caught him, downed him, and persuaded him to render up his tail—well, one doesn't go out of his way to be rude to that sort

of dog, and Buster and Old Bill sat and looked on while Toto let them see what one small dog could do with two large dinners when he set his mind to it. Toto left nothing, not even the smell of cooking, and when he was nosing *under* the dishes to make sure nothing had been left out, there was a sudden commotion outside of the high yard gates, and the whole pack, thirty couples of them, with Ranter leading, came scrambling over the top and dropped into the yard.

"Hullo there," shouted Ranter. "Has anybody seen a fox? Come along, answer sharp. We haven't time to wait."

"What was that?" asked Toto, turning round as cool as cool. "Seen a fox, did you say? *Seen* a fox?"

He picked up the brush and waggled it about.

"Ho, ho," he laughed. "*Has* anybody seen a fox?"

Ranter promptly sat down and blinked, and every other hound there did the same. *They* hadn't a word to say either. And then a horse's head was pushed over the top of the gate—the liver chestnut. Old Lady Bedlam and the huntsman and the Major and the Duke were the only ones up, and when they looked over the yard gate it was to see the pack squatting round in a respectful ring with their tongues hanging out—yards and yards of wet tongue.

And there, in the middle of the yard, on the bare stone pavement, lay the brush; and over the brush, defying the lot of them, stood the gallant Toto.

"Look at that white tip," said the Major. "It was the Old 'Un right enough."

The huntsman took off his velvet cap, and the Duke offered to buy back the liver chestnut. But old Lady Bedlam wasn't listening.

"Give you fifty for the small dog, Major," she said.

"Done," said the Major.

"The brush, of course," went on Lady Bedlam, "goes with the dog. It appears to be his."

Little Toto was getting a little of his own back.



WONG CHOW SQUARES UP

By J. G. FYFE

I

Had Wong Chow's knowledge of English slang been as complete as his repertoire of waterside *pidgin*, he would most probably have described himself as "fed-up". This was a most unusual state of mind for him to be in; the whole fourteen years of his life, at least as many of them as he could remember, had been full of hard work and endless danger, for Wong Chow had been born on a junk and had lived there ever since. Practically from the time he could walk, too, he had had to help his father with the working of the vessel, so that by the time he was ten he was one of the smartest sailors in the junk fleet. Consequently there was little room for boredom in his scheme of things—except, that is, on certain occasions such as the present. The trouble had all started a fortnight before when, on beating up the har-

bour towards the usual anchorage in Pearl River, Wong saw the typhoon signal flying from the flagstaff on Battery Point. His father, to whom he reported, straightway headed the junk for the shelter of Typhoon Bay, and there they had remained for two weeks on end. It was only that morning that the danger signal had been lowered, and, as a fresh breeze was blowing seawards, they had lost no time in hoisting the great lateen sail and making for the fishing grounds. Wong Chow's heart had been light as he took the tiller and steered the junk away from Hongkong, but his cheerfulness soon changed to despair when the wind left them becalmed in the channel after they had been under way for not more than five minutes. All morning he had waited for the breeze to return, but in vain, and he now knew that it would be evening before they could move from their present position. Hence the reason why the boy was lying on the deck at the bows, staring gloomily overside.

Now Wong Chow was inordinately proud of his father's junk, though, indeed, the craft presented few attractions to the casual observer. To the Chinese boy, however, she was home, and he took tremendous pride in keeping her in order. Presently, therefore, he turned and looked along the length of the ship, past the pig-sty and the hen-coop, to the living quarters, in front of which sat his father playing with his little brother. Wong noted with satisfaction some of the repairs he had done during the enforced rest in Typhoon Bay, and was just summoning up courage to ask his father to give him some money to buy paint and varnish for the woodwork, when his mother came out of the little cabin and called to him.

"Oh, thou foolish one, to be thinking again of the junk. Thou hast eyes for nothing else."

"I was but telling myself the truth," the boy answered. "There is no finer junk in the Yellow Sea."

"Is that all thine empty mind can get to do?" asked his father sharply. He was by nature a most untidy man, and he could never understand his son's concern for the ship. "What if she is dirty," he would say. "What if the sail is patched and the mast is creaking—the eyes in the bow are bright and the junk still sails. She

still carries fish—and fish mean money—and money means a peaceful old age for thy father."

This attitude invariably angered Wong and so he answered:

"Yes, my empty mind can think of more than money. Thou wouldst not care were the deck like the sty of the pig."

"Watch thy tongue," said the older man, "I may not care but I still can use the whip."

At this hidden threat Wong relapsed into silence, and began to survey a great warship which was lying in the shadow of Hong-kong Peak. Presently a motor-launch detached itself from the side of the leviathan and rapidly approached the junk. Wong saw that it contained some twenty boys, all of them seemingly talking and laughing at the same time. The Chinese boy felt decidedly envious, not of the midshipmen themselves, but of their engine, and so he called to his father, who, attracted by the noise of the motor, was now looking over the side:

"If we had an engine like that we would not remain idle here."

The other only grunted, then after a moment or two he said:

"They go to Pleasant Bay to swim and enjoy themselves. They have a happy time these young white boys."

The launch was now almost abreast the junk, and Wong, on closer inspection of the graceful little craft, felt for the first time in his life ashamed of his floating home. His envy vanished and his interest quickened, however, when the engine gave a few tired snorts and stopped. Immediately one of the boys lifted off the cover and began to turn a handle; but nothing happened. The boy who was steering, and who seemed to be in charge, started to shout angrily, and several others tried their skill, without producing any effect. Finally the steersman himself left his place and grasped the handle—he turned and turned till his face was red and the perspiration was dripping off the point of his nose, but in spite of it all the engine refused to go. It was at this critical moment that Wong laughed. Whether it was the infection of his laugh or the humour of the scene, it is impossible to say, but the fact remains that his father laughed, and his mother, who was also watching the proceeding, laughed, and all the boys in the launch burst into a roar of delight. The steersman, however,

only got red ter in the face, and one of his companions slapped him on the back and said:

"Tubby, my son, the little Chink has sized up the situation. We are just for laughing at."

"For laughing at, are we?" shouted Tubby. "If I could get hold of that yellow-faced little swine, I'd wring his filthy neck."

Now one of the few real English words which Wong knew was the word "swine". He recognized it as soon as it was spoken, and he sensed that the speaker was referring to him, so he reached out his hand and, lifting a piece of wet and very dirty rag from the deck, threw it with all his force at the offender. It hit him full in the face, and all the other boys laughed again. The insult still rankled in the Chinese boy's mind, but he was quite prepared to leave matters as they stood. Tubby, however, was almost overcome with rage—he stood up in the boat and began to shout at the pitch of his voice:

"You yellow-skinned little ruffian, I'll come aboard your blasted junk and——"

"Don't make a blithering ass of yourself, Tubby," said one of the midshipmen. "What on earth's the use of losing your rag?"

"He hasn't lost his rag," chimed in someone else. "There it is lying on the thwart."

Thereupon the whole boat's crew burst into another roar of delighted laughter, and the family in the junk, though they didn't understand the joke, joined the chorus. This was too much for the irate Tubby. He shook his fist at the grinning Wong, and uttered a Chinese word, probably the only one he knew, meaning "You lop-eared son of a dog". Then things started to move. Wong, eager to retaliate, lifted a heavy iron bar, and was just about to throw it when the wash of a passing steamer struck the launch, causing Tubby to overbalance, and throwing him into the water. Now Wong, like a good marksman, had had his eye fixed on his target, and so he was the only person to notice that the midshipman in falling had struck his head on the gunwale. In a trice he had laid down his missile, and, before anyone else had realized what was happening, he had dived over the side.

It so happened that at this particular place the bottom was

covered with dense beds of long, stringy seaweed which had on many occasions brought disaster to swimmers. The English boy had sunk like a stone, and though Wong had lost no time in following him, it was a few moments before his eyes became accustomed to the light. But these few moments had been sufficient to enable the sinuous bands of seaweed to twine themselves round Tubby's body, so that when Wong found him he was firmly held down. The Chinese boy was quick to realize the extreme danger of the situation, not only for the unconscious midshipman, but also for anyone who attempted rescue. To get entangled in the weed was almost certain death, and yet he had to do something—quickly.

II

When Wong Chow was questioned about this incident several days later, he had no very clear idea of what happened after he dived from the junk. Events had moved with such speed that they had made no permanent impression on his mind, and beyond the fact that he had had one fixed determination—to rescue Tubby—he could tell nothing.

The midshipmen in the launch, however, will never forget the incidents of those few minutes, and so the conclusion of the story comes most fittingly from a letter written by one of them to his people at home.

"None of us," he wrote, "had noticed that Tubby had struck himself in falling, and so when the little Chink dived in after him we were all inclined to take the affair as rather a joke, because Tubby is easily the best swimmer on the ship. When neither of them appeared, however, we began to feel a bit jumpy, and Bobby Jones started to take off his shoes. He was just going over when the Chink came to the surface and gripped the gunwale.

"'Knife,' he said.

"There was dead silence for a moment, and then someone yelled:

"'Look out! He's going to murder Tubby!'

"Nearly all of us had the same idea in our heads, but fortunately Bobby, who has been on the China station longer



"What for, knife?"

than any of us, and who knows Hongkong harbour like the palm of his hand, kept his wits.

" 'What for, knife?' he asked.

" 'Allee same, lound legs,' was the reply. 'Knife, chop-chop.'

"Then he noticed the painter, an unusually long one, lying in the bow.

" 'Makee gib lope,' he said. 'Me——'

"He performed an indescribable gesture with his left hand, but somehow we all understood that he was going to reeve the rope round Tubby, and that we were to haul in. Someone handed him a knife which he put between his teeth, and then, gripping the loose end of the painter, he went under again.

"Bobby explained the situation briefly.

" 'I expect Tubby has been caught in seaweed,' he said. 'I seem to remember something about a bad patch hereabouts. In

any case, I'm going down to see. Don't you fellows haul till I come up and give the word.'

"Bobby told us afterwards that he found the Chink hacking away at the seaweed tentacles with the knife. He had already wound the rope round Tubby, though how he did it goodness knows. At any rate, Bobby saw that the rope was the only hope, so he came up at once and gave us the word to start heaving in. We had practically no difficulty at all, thanks to the Chink's knife-work, but when Tubby did break surface and we got him aboard we thought he was all in. However, we ferried him over to the junk, and two of the fellows started artificial respiration, while we others hailed a passing tug and sent to the ship for a doctor.

"Meantime Bobby was attending to the show down below. The Chinese boy (by the way his name is Wong) collapsed as soon as Tubby was free. His legs were firmly held by the weed, but fortunately the action of his body while he was using the knife had prevented any other part of him being caught. Anyway Bobby got on to the job and somehow or other pulled him clear. By this time Jack Summers and Peter Hooke had joined the bathing party, and it was they who landed Bobby and Wong, both of them unconscious. Bobby came round in a few minutes but we had an awful job with Wong. In fact, when the Doc arrived, and heard that Tubby had been down five minutes (believe me, it seemed more like five hours) and the little Chink almost as long, he just shook his head as much as to say, 'Well, they're both goners.' However, he did what he could, and we kept pumping air into them. At length, after an hour's work Wong opened his eyes and grinned feebly. Tubby was a much longer job, but eventually we got life into him too, though the knock on the head had made him semi-delirious. Doc insisted that we should take both of them back to the ship at once. Wong's male parent was a bit upset at this; it appeared that the boy was necessary to work the junk, and that if they didn't put to sea that night a great deal of money would be lost. However, the doctor was adamant, and in ~~any~~ case we didn't want to let Wong go, for he had shown himself to be a ripping little sport, especially after the way Tubby had treated him.

"Next day Wong was as bright as ever—he's one of the cheeriest youngsters I ever met—and Tubby was also up and about, though he had obviously been shaken severely. The meeting between the two was pricelessly funny. They could, of course, only talk in pidgin, but somehow they seemed to have no difficulty in getting at one another's meaning. Tubby, for all the world like a big naughty baby, gripped Wong's hand and shook it fiercely, all the time muttering incoherent things about "Jolly sporting thing to do—sorry such beastly cad—hope be friends." While Wong, smiling cheerfully, contented himself with one remark.

"'I t'inks,' he said, 'we makee now, what you call, allee same square.'

"He must have picked up the phrase on the dock side, but anyway he knew its meaning, and it shows more than anything else that he is the right sort. He became the hero of the whole ship.

"Tubby very sportingly went to the old man and told him the whole story. He gave Tubby a pretty plain heart-to-heart talk—at least so we imagine, Tubby himself having said nothing about it. The old man gave us permission to keep Wong on board as mess-room steward but—would you believe it!—when we told him, he refused to stay. It seemed that his heart was in the junk, though what anyone could see in such a ramshackle old tub beats me. It was decided, however, that he should stay with us till his father came back from the fishing grounds.

"Meantime we were in the soup, we didn't know how to repay him. Then one day we all went a picnic in the launch, and Wong let slip that one of his fondest ambitions was to own a boat with an engine. That gave us an idea, and we decided that somehow or other we'd gratify his desire. We all subscribed as much money as we could, the old man and the other officers gave us whacking big cheques, and when the lower deck heard what was on foot they sent a cap round. The boat is now ordered—it's quite a decent-sized affair with a small cabin, and I shouldn't be surprised if Wong didn't go back to the junk after all. He has transferred his affections to the launch, and is already making plans for taking up a ferry run in the harbour."

THE CLUE OF THE FOUR THREES

By MICHAEL W. KAYE

"What's happened to 'Fossils'?" yawned Tom Brilster, stretching his arms wide as he lolled back on the form where he and his school-fellows of the Upper Fourth awaited the coming of Mr. Kitson, the science master, who came to Wilgrant College twice a week.

"Blown himself up with his experiments," laughed Dick Willis. "I say, look at the clock! We're due for French class with Monsoo in ten minutes. It's no use waiting here."

Rob Dent gave the speaker a nudge. The Head had entered the classroom and looked round at the masterless class.

"Mr. Kitson not arrived?" he demanded. "Very strange, *very* strange! He is lunching with me to-day, too. Important business. Twelve o'clock. Well, you boys had better go down to Monsieur Parve. I must ring up Mr. Kitson."

The boys went reluctantly. The science lesson as well as the science master were favourites with them—and they hated French! By the time the dinner bell went Monsieur Parve had reduced the class to a state of gloom and irritation. Nor had the Head become less anxious since morning.

"Can't understand about Kitson at all," Brilster heard him say to the English master. "His sister tells me he left home at the usual time. She has just rung up again to say he has not returned. She has communicated with the police, fearing some accident. I shall go over to Winsdale this afternoon to inquire."

Bad luck! When Tom told the story later his school-fellows quite agreed. Fossils was an out and out good fellow and they hated to think he might have come to grief.

"Gored by a bull, I expect," said Gloomy Roger, who always justified his nickname on such occasions. "Freddie Hale and I were chased by one last term. Fossils is a bit blind, and I expect he thought it was an amiable cow."

"Lost in a bog," hinted Wallie Reeves cheerily. "He might

be—easily. If he thought he saw a fossil he would leap first and look too late.”

“Kidnapped by burglars or Bolsheviks,” chirped Green, who revelled in “Tubby Haig” stories.

A howl of laughter greeted this suggestion, and then the bell rang for classes, and the subject was dropped for a few hours.

By tea-time the disappearance of Mr. Kitson had become the chief interest with both boys and masters. The police had been called in, and an Inspector arrived at the College just before five o'clock, but the information he elicited was the reverse of ample. Mr. Kitson had been in normal health and spirits on the preceding Tuesday. He had given the lesson for to-day's class and had accepted an invitation to luncheon with the Head. He had left home on foot at ten o'clock and ought to have been at the College by eleven. He had not arrived. No trace of him could be found.

Next day was half-holiday, and, though football claimed the majority of the boys, a certain number talked of going out to search for their favourite master.

“Of course, if he's on the moors, or in the river, he's dead,” said Gloomy Roger, “but we might find the body.”

It was when the other boys were scattering to their various holiday occupations that Dick Willis buttonholed Brilster.

“I'm not going to start shouting,” he said, “but—look here, Tom—could we make any sort of clue of this? It was between the pages of Fossils' blotter. I picked it up yesterday when his things were being put back in his desk. At first I thought it just an odd piece of scribbled foolscap but—well, look at it.”

He spread out a crumpled half-sheet of lined foolscap. There were scribbblings at the top—resembling the letter *three*, in groups of four; on one line the four threes were parallel, in another they formed a square, in another the letter T. *Always the four threes*, and little arrows in red ink pointed to the group forming a square.

“Well,” said Tom, rubbing his nose. “What do you make of it? It's not sums—or *sense!*”

Dick frowned. “I'm calling it the Clue of the Four Threes,” he retorted. “Are you game to help me follow it up without saying a word to anyone?”

Tom laughed sarcastically. "*Am* I game?" he mocked. "But if it is a pukka clue you're a better 'tec than I am."

"Right-oh!" said Dick. "Come right along now."

"Where to?" asked Tom.

"In search of those four threes," was the reply.

And Tom, though feeling remarkably unlike Sherlock Holmes, obeyed without further question.

But, during the next half-hour, he began to suspect that his chum had a screw loose somewhere, for Dick was making a bee-line across the moors towards Wardale. As they reached the "Tinker's Hole"—a bramble-filled pit known as the best of spots for blackberrying—Dick took the turn to the right. Tom's curiosity overcame his annoyance at not being able to unravel the mystery.

"Hang it all, old chap," he urged. "You're not going to look for the four threes in the mists on the top of Wellan Tor?"

Dick halted. "No," he said, "I may not find the four threes anywhere, but I'll chance your jeers and tell you what I've got in my head. You know Fossils is mad on anything old. I remember going with him to Halkford once and he told me jolly interesting stories of smugglers and highwaymen, as well as caves and fossils. He told me one story about a gang of highwaymen who lived in these parts at the time of dear old Dick Turpin. The chief of these highwaymen was Nimble Nat, a fellow who was killed by his horse blundering over a cliff in the dark. He had a regular warren of caves under the moors, but no one has ever discovered them. Fossils told me he was as keen as mustard on discovering them, and said he wondered whether the legend of the grey horseman who was supposed to ride round Wellan Rocks had any connection. Fossils himself must have passed within sight of these rocks every time he came up to the College, and—well! It makes me think."

Tom's eyes sparkled. Here was an adventure, but where would it lead? The police had certainly searched Wellan Rocks and had found no trace of the lost man. After all, could any meaning be attached to those scribblings?

"It's going to be a long job," he complained. "You don't really suppose Fossils got a clue which had been searched for for umpteen years? It's hopeless!"

"Probably," said Dick, "but I'm going over each of these stones in search of the threes. If you're bored, go back to the College."

But Tom was not bored. He was merely a sceptic. Dick gave him a number of rocks to examine and he proceeded to his task with sundry yawns.

All at once, Tom's roving glance focused on the stone before him, the third in the most shallow and uninteresting group. But a piece of yellow lichen had caught his eye and the next moment he was on his knees..

Some sort of mark was scraped or carved into the stone, though weather and time hid it from a casual glance. What was it? Had someone else rubbed that surface clean? Why—it looked like a letter three . . . *it was* the letter three, repeated four times, twice on the one slab, and twice on the smaller slab close wedged to it!



"So they are! I say!"

The Clue of the Four Threes

Tom sat back on his heels and whistled. His freckled face had grown red with excitement. Dick dropped from a rock above.

"No luck, I suppose?" he asked.

Tom grinned. It was his turn to supply the thrill.

"Only four threes all in a row," he retorted, "and someone has been monkeying around here."

It was a marvel Dick did not break all his bones as he tumbled down to his chum's level.

"*Four threes!*" he whispered. "So they are! I say!"

"Of course you say! It's the sort of thing you *would* do. You say, 'I told you so'. Well, you did, but I'll put you in a bag and boil you if you keep on crowing. This is my field day. Four threes in a row—and where's the foolscap? Exactly—the red arrow marks the *square* formation. We've got to move these two rocks so that the figures make a square instead of a line. Then—the clue is in our hands."

When a grating thud sounded from beneath the shifted rock they knew they were on a right track.

The four threes formed an exact square—and the first slab of rock had sunk out of sight, leaving a hole big and deep enough for a man to pass through.

It was too startling a discovery for the boys to cheer over. Dick was the first to rally.

"Steady, Tom," he said huskily. "We've got to be slow and sure. Ten to one Fossils got inside and couldn't get out."

Dick lay flat on the ground, thrusting his hand and arm down into the black pit, so that the torch cast its yellow light around.

"That's about it," he agreed. "I can see the rock—it's only about four feet down—I could drop on the centre of it and use my torch better."

Tom nodded. "I'll stay on the right side of the cave," he added, "in case of accidents. Ready?"

Dick lowered himself carefully. When he reached the rock he pulled out his flash-lamp; as he did so he gave an exclamation of astonishment.

Tom leaned over.

"Well?" he shouted. "What's there? Can you see anyone?" Dick looked up.

"It's enormous," he called. "Huge! There's a slope leading down to what looks like a monster cavern. There are rocks—blocking what must have been a second entrance. Wait there, Tom. I want to see about this rock. It works on a pivot. When I jump off, it may slip round and close. Could you drop me down some big stones? That's the game! We can fix the trap—and then explore. See?"

Tom obeyed. —

"That right?" he asked presently. "Wait, though! There's Gregory the postman going along the road. I'm going to yell to him. He can have a look about and see how the trap works, then go on to the College and tell the Head. You see—if we find Kitson——"

"Yup," agreed Dick. "Scoot! I'll wait."

Tom yelled.

"E—eh?" sang Gregory.

"*Caves!*" shouted Tom. "Someone inside. Go at the double to the College and say we've found Mr. Kitson. I mean *are* finding him. But come across and have a look first."

Luckily Gregory had heard all the story of the lost master, and, because he loved having his finger in every pie, he obeyed.

The sight of the hole under Wellan Rocks, fairly amazed him.

"E—eh!" he exclaimed again.

"We're going down to find Mr. Kitson," said Tom. "*if*—listen!—*if* the stone's back in the place when you bring help you'll know we are underneath. Set that line of threes in a square, and the rock sinks. *Don't* forget. Now—at the double, Gregory, for the College."

Gregory was only too pleased to obey.

Gathering speed as he proceeded, he arrived at high pressure to explode his bomb under the very noses of a distressed Head and gloomy masters.

Meantime, Tom, having taken precautions against being buried alive, lowered himself over the pit. "Coming, Dick," he shouted.

"Steady then," echoed the answer, and a few seconds later the



Dick's cry of discovery echoed in the dismal place

discoverers were hurrying down towards that mighty cave where Nimble Nat had found quarters for his gang and their booty.

It was Dick who called a halt. "I heard something," he said. The two lads drew very close together. They were in complete darkness saving for their torches; the air struck dank and chill.

It seemed like a place of death.

Dick tried to whistle but the attempt fizzled out.

Then—yes, from abysmal darkness a groan came travelling to meet them—a groan of agony. Tom's arm dropped to his side. He was horribly afraid. So was Dick! but the latter's voice rang high, filling the vaults with echoes. "Who's there?" he shouted. "Who's there?"

No answer, but in a moment Dick's cry of discovery echoed in the dismal place.

"Look, over there. I say, Tom!—there's Kitson!"

The combined light of two electric torches was instantly concentrated on that distant corner. I can't hope to describe how those boys felt. It was gruesome work to stand here in the vaulted cave—with great, piled rocks frowning down on them—and to see the huddled figure of the man they sought lying there, without being able to determine whether or no he was dead.

It needed courage to advance. Was Mr. Kitson dead?

They reached his side together. Dick was the first to kneel and turn the huddled figure over on to its back. As he did so a groan broke from Mr. Kitson's lips.

With the sweat pouring down their faces and a chill in every limb, the boys peered down:

Yes, it was indeed John Kitson, and alive. His eyes slowly opened, but he did not seem to see the boys. The horror which had been with him when he fell was present now.

Then, all at once, he realized that strong human arms upheld him, that a tall figure moved forward and bent over him. Tom's voice was the most blessed music that had ever broken on his ears.

"All right, sir. It's Willis and Brilster from the College. Help is coming. You'll soon be out of here."

The resourceful Dick had brought oranges and chocolate by way of restorative, whilst Tom located the spring of water and brought a capful. After such refreshment, Mr. Kitson declared he was able to walk, and proved the contrary by instantly collapsing. The boys reassured him.

"Gregory will bring help," they said. "I believe, sir, we'd better wait."

Mr. Kitson smiled. "Splendid boys!" he whispered weakly. Then, at intervals during that time of waiting, he told his story.

He had known of the clue of the four threes from an old MS. concerning the story of Nimble Nat, but neither the writer of the book nor he knew where that mysterious sign was to be found. He had searched for it practically all over the moors, and only on the preceding day had chance shown him the secret. He had seen a bird—a stranger to his scientific knowledge—and had followed it to Wellan Rocks, had tripped or slipped on the lichen—and had fallen across the long-sought stones.

At sight of the four threes he had entirely forgotten his class, the College, and the Head's invitation. Following the clue, he had shifted the stones to the "combination", had climbed down, and, with the greatest horror, saw the huge rock glide up on its pivot to its place. He knew he was trapped, and for hours had groped about, shouting, calling, shrieking in terror till he fell, striking his head on a rock and remaining unconscious till the boys found him. He dared not say—or think—of what would have been his fate had not Willis picked up a crumpled, scribbled piece of foolscap.

At last voices were heard in the upper cave. Lanterns and torches shed broad beams of light as the Head, with Inspector Jones and two of the College masters, came hurrying down to them. The pallor and suffering on John Kitson's face warned them not to ask for explanations just then. A stretcher was brought, and in due time the rescued man was carried down to the cross roads where his anxious sister was waiting in a car, with a doctor in attendance.

Not till the car was on its way back to Wardale did the Head turn to the boys and hold out his hand to each. How his eyes twinkled too as he congratulated them in crisp, hearty tones.

"You'll be the heroes of the College, eh," said he. "Don't spoil a fine record, lads, by getting swollen head. Thank God you have both been instrumental in saving a fellow-creature's life. Now, if you know the secret of this great clue I should be glad to see the mouth of those caves closed before half the College boys break their necks trying to see Nimble Nat's ghost."

Tom and Dick grinned, as, half reluctantly, they obeyed.

"There *might* be a buried treasure down there, sir" hinted Dick. "It seems a pity——"

"Of course it does," replied the Head. "A thousand pities to keep school-fellows and others in suspense over your fates. We had begun to think you had been kidnapped too, when Gregory appeared. But—well, as to the treasure, we must leave it till another day. I suggest that you keep the clue of the four threes till a properly organized party is able to undertake an exploration of those caves. At the moment, supper and bed should be more in your line. Off we go."

CROCODILE ISLAND

BY R. DE M. RUDOLF

I

The officers of the steamship *Mary Ellis* were up against a difficulty. The negro steward was down with fever of some kind, and the prospect of having to fly the "yellow Jack" and spend a month in quarantine, off a dull port on the west coast of Africa, was by no means pleasing.

"I'd like to put him ashore," said Captain Harlick, "and call for him when we come back. Then we need say nothing about it."

"But who's going to look after him?" asked the First. "You can't put him ashore by himself."

"Look here, Dacre," said the Captain. "You're a bit of a favourite with the crew; just see if you can get someone to volunteer to look after Jim for a week or two ashore; it will be double pay for them."

Tom Dacre, the Second Officer, went off on his errand; but found no one willing to take the job on.

It was not surprising. A stay of uncertain length on the pestilential coast of Guinea, as nurse to a sick negro, offered little attraction, in spite of double pay.

The Captain looked gloomy when Tom reported his failure.

"Its infernally awkward," he grumbled. "It means a loss of hundreds of pounds if we're put in quarantine, and the owners won't like that! Will you take the job on, Dacre?" And he looked appealingly at Tom.

Dacre looked towards the low-lying shore, covered with a misty haze, and hesitated.

"I'll give you a good rifle," added the Captain persuasively. "There's lots of sport there. Besides," he added, "I believe Jim comes from this part of the coast, and I dare say you may be able to hand him over to his people, then you can enjoy yourself."

"Um," said Tom; "the prospect doesn't tempt me much from a sporting point of view; but anyhow you may count me in. It will give poor old Jim a better chance of getting well, than if he stays in the fo'c'sle."

"Good boy!" exclaimed the Captain, shaking him heartily by the hand. "You bet I won't forget it!"

In less than an hour, the motor-launch, in charge of the Captain, was towing a boat towards the shore, in which were Tom and his black patient, together with a variety of stores.

The launch turned into the mouth of a muddy river, and before long came to an island which promised a dry landing. There were tall palms growing on it, and a quantity of bush and bracken.

Tom was pleased with the island, which he judged would, at all events, be free from wild beasts; and, springing on shore, was soon busy in superintending the pitching of his camp. A space was cleared, and some spars and canvas made a good shelter into which the stores were carried. Finally Jim was brought from the boat and safely housed in the tent.

The dinghy was left for Tom's use, and with a parting cheer from the crew, and a hearty handshake from the Captain, the motor-launch went off; but it was with a curious feeling of loneliness that Tom heard the beat of the engine die away in the distance.

He shook off the feeling, and turned to busy himself by making things shipshape. He made the boat secure, and carried off the oars to the tent, where he was much distressed to find poor Jim all the worse for his journey. He was tossing about deliriously, and talking rapidly in some native dialect. Tom did what he could for his patient, and various tasks kept him busy until the tropical darkness suddenly descended, and he lay down to sleep.

The restlessness of Jim and the weird noises from the adjacent forest kept him wide awake for some hours. At last he dropped off to sleep, and woke suddenly to find daylight stealing into the tent. He turned to look at the sick man, but the bed was empty!

Tom leaped up, dashed out of the tent, and some hundred

yards away beheld the negro, wrapped in a blanket, standing on the edge of the island gazing into the river!

He ran forward, but before he could reach him, Jim had plunged head foremost into the water!

In a flash Tom sprang after him, and in a few strokes was able to grasp him by his hair, and tow him unresistingly to a shelving bank. Here he laid the negro, while he himself recovered his breath.

The blanket in which Jim had been wrapped was floating a few yards off, when suddenly Tom saw it fall a prey to the jaws of a huge crocodile, and noticed that several others were hastening to the feast.

He was far too close to the water to feel comfortable with these creatures about. Without a moment's delay he seized Jim, who was lying in a helpless condition, and half carried and half dragged him to the tent, where he wrapped him in blankets.

Tom was a little uneasy to find that the river was infested with crocodiles, as he thought it quite possible they might pay him a visit on the island. He therefore resolved to put up a fence which would give him some protection from unwelcome visitors. He took his axe, and worked hard for an hour or two preparing suitable stakes, and while so employed made a curious discovery!

Among the thick bushes, he stumbled upon some roughly hewn steps leading downward. He cautiously descended, and found himself in a cave, the mouth of which opened on to the river.

As his eyes became accustomed to the gloom, he noticed, against the wall facing the river, a hideous wooden idol, six or seven feet high! It was evidently old, but was still adorned with a variety of rags and beads!

The weirdness of the discovery, and possibly the dampness of the cave made him shiver, and he lost little time in making his way back to the daylight.

II

To Tom's joy and surprise, Jim's mad plunge into the river had done nothing but good.

After a long sleep, he woke without any trace of fever, though still weak, and by the following day was almost himself again.

His recovery went on by leaps and bounds, aided by the tunes which Tom played on his banjo, and which were a never-ending source of delight to the negro.

One evening Tom mentioned his discovery of the idol, but was very sorry he had done so, for from that moment Jim betrayed the greatest uneasiness, and continually pressed Tom to leave the island at once.

"Very bad place," said Jim, "wicked men come here and many bad spirits."

"Rubbish," replied Tom. "You don't believe in evil spirits, Jim; you told me once you had been baptized."

"Yes, I've baptized right enough," said Jim, shaking his head, "but plenty evil spirits in African forests. That's why I become sailor. This place full of them. We go away and they do us no harm."

"Don't be silly, Jim. Captain won't find us if we leave here."

"But I take you through the forest!" cried Jim eagerly, "to where white men live. Three, four days' march!"

The prospect of three or four days' tramp through the tangle of swamps carrying heavy loads, did not appeal to Tom, as he thought that at any time he might hear the throb of the motor-launch coming to fetch them.

Jim grew moody at Tom's refusal to leave the island, and even the banjo failed to bring out his responsive grin.

"Look here," said Tom, "don't be a fool, it's only a rotten bit of wood; come and have a look at it?"

Rather unwillingly Jim followed Tom into the cave, but he was silent, and ill at ease in the presence of the grotesque image.

"Look, look!" he cried. "Here come the bad spirits!"

Tom looked to the river, and beheld five or six huge crocodiles making towards the entrance to the cave, their hideous jaws snapping as they raised their slimy heads.

With a yell, Jim fled up the steps, and, as one hideous reptile commenced to climb out of the water towards him, Tom lost no time in following Jim's example.

It was certainly an uncanny experience—and Tom on reflection felt sure that these reptiles were accustomed to meet with food at the entrance to the cave. Could it be a place of human sacrifice?

He did not want to leave the island to face a difficult and possibly dangerous journey through the primeval forest; but it was clear that any long stay would be bad for his companion.

In spite of all Tom's efforts to rouse him, Jim gradually sank into a state of despondency and alarm, which threatened to affect Tom himself.

"I'm going to do something," he said at last. "I shall take my axe, and smash that beastly idol to pieces! and let the crocs feed on that."

Jim stared at him with wide open eyes, evidently terror-struck at this suggestion.

"No, no, Massa Dacre, you not go! If you go, I drown myself! for you will never come back."

His terror was so great that at last Tom had to promise, if Jim would rouse himself, he would let the idol alone.

"Now," said Tom the next day, "just you take the axe and cut some wood—we must finish this fence—and I'll set to work and cook our dinner."

Tom finished his task, and was about to go and look for Jim, when the latter returned. He carried no stakes with him, however, and looked so excited that Tom sprang up, thinking he had gone mad.

The negro was breathing fast, and the perspiration was rolling off his face.

"What's the matter, Jim?" asked Tom, keeping a wary eye on him.

"Oh, Massa Dacre, you very kind. I have killed the idol, and thrown him to the crocodiles! Now the bad spirits will not touch you. I have done it, not you."

Tom was much touched at the thought that this poor black fellow had dared the invisible perils that were so real to him, rather than that he, Tom, should incur any danger.

"You're a good fellow, Jim. You see the idol has not harmed you, so cheer up, the Captain will be back soon."

"Better you go away first," muttered Jim.

For the rest of the day he went about his various jobs without any sign of the fears he had shown before, except that whenever a crocodile came in view, he would clutch Tom's arm, and point him out with the words: "Bad spirit come for me!"

Tom noticed that these ugly monsters were either more numerous or more active than formerly, and he resolved to get the rifle the Captain had given him, and see if he could reduce their numbers.

Jim shook his head as he saw the rifle being loaded, being of opinion that it was of no use trying to shoot bad spirits.

Tom did not want to waste his cartridges, and judged he would find the reptiles at the entrance to the cave. He was not mistaken. Hardly had he shown himself there, when there came a violent agitation of the water; and a long ugly head, with cold malignant eyes, and cruel rows of pointed teeth, appeared within a few feet of where he stood.

He fired right between the jaws, and the next moment the hideous head sank on to the oozy bank of the river. Another monster was slowly clambering out of the water, and again Tom fired.

The brute was evidently badly hurt, and lashed the water furiously with his long tail, until another shot from Tom's rifle finished him off. No more crocodiles appearing, he returned to the tent well satisfied, and even Jim seemed surprised that the bad spirits had allowed themselves to be so easily killed.

Tom went to bed that night feeling he had done something to quiet Jim's fears; but woke next morning to find that his faithful friend had vanished again from the tent!

III

Tom searched the island, but found no trace of the missing man.

Could Jim have had a relapse and plunged into the river again? Then it occurred to him to go down to the place where the boat was moored, and he found it missing!



He struck furiously right and left

This altered the look of affairs, and a hasty search of the tent revealed the fact that a piece of bacon, biscuits, and other food had also disappeared. It slowly dawned on Tom that Jim's desertion had been carefully planned and carried out. To say that Tom was disappointed would be expressing his feelings somewhat feebly. He had formed a high opinion of the negro's character during their close companionship on the island, and now this revelation of cowardice and selfishness shattered all his previous ideas.

He went back to the tent and sat down dejectedly. How long was he to wait here alone for the Captain's return? What a fool he had been to put himself in this position for the sake of a worthless negro!

He picked up his banjo and began to strum it dolefully. Sud-

Crocodile Island

denly he became aware of a movement behind him; and, turning sharply, came face to face with a hideously painted, half-naked savage!

The man had a spear in his hand, and it flashed on Tom that in another moment the spear might be plunged into him. Instinctively he struck at the savage's head with the only weapon at hand. He struck with a force that sent the man's head clean through the banjo!

With a startled yell the savage jerked the banjo out of Tom's grasp, and turned and fled with it round his neck, and Tom went in hot pursuit.

He had scarcely gone a hundred yards, when he pulled up suddenly. From right and left a score or more of fierce looking warriors started up and came running towards him, with shouts and gestures that left no doubt as to their intentions.

There was no time for hesitation. His rifle was in his tent, and in a moment he had taken to his heels, and it is doubtful if he had ever done a hundred yards in quicker time. In an instant he snatched it up, and rushed out to confront his howling pursuers.

The sight of the rifle checked his enemies. But it was only for a moment. There came an excited howl from one who seemed to be the leader, and then he was in the midst of a wild seething mob, stabbing furiously at him with their spears!

The very rage of his enemies proved his salvation, for they impeded one another in their bloodthirsty fury to get at him.

He clubbed his rifle and struck furiously right and left. Fight as he would the contest was too unequal. Twice he had felt the sharp spear, and then staggered back dizzy at a blow from a club.

Suddenly a miracle happened! By one common impulse the yelling mob of enemies fled! and when his senses cleared, he saw a party of armed sailors in hot pursuit of them.

"Massa Dacre! Massa Dacre!" came a voice that he knew well. And the next moment, he was grasping the hand of Jim!

Together they went to the tent, and when Tom's wounds had been attended to, he heard Jim's story.

Early in the morning he had climbed a palm tree, and seeing

the smoke of a steamer in the offing, had rowed out in the hope of intercepting it. Fortunately his signals were seen, and to his joy it proved to be a French gun-boat. Thus was Tom rescued in the nick of time!

"Very bad island this," continued Jim. "Bad men come here this time to feed the crocodiles with man's flesh!"

"By Jove!" said Tom. "I suppose they would have chucked me to the crocs in another minute or two!"

"Yes, yes," agreed Jim. "They would be real mad to find their idol smashed up, and they think it was you!—so they want to kill you!"

"Do you think they brought any prisoners with them?" asked Tom.

"Yes, for sure," responded Jim. "I go look for them."

In a moment he jumped up, and returned ten minutes later, bringing with him four miserable natives whom he had found bound in the cave; and who had undoubtedly been brought to be sacrificed to the crocodiles.

The gun-boat landed them at Accra, where the *Mary Ellis* was to call; but, to Tom's surprise, Jim refused to rejoin the ship.

"After what we've been through," said Tom. "I thought you would have stuck to me."

The negro grinned, and took Tom aside. "I'se going to Cape Town," he said, "to open big store. You come some day, and buy everything for nothing in my store." He looked round mysteriously, and then pressed a shapeless object into Tom's hand.

"Put it in your pocket quick," he whispered, "it come from idoll!" And so saying, he disappeared among the motley throng on the quayside.

An hour or two afterwards Tom opened the mysterious package and found thirty-nine first-rate diamonds!

SHANKLAND'S DETECTIVE AGENCY

By VALERIUS PASCAL

I

"Ye gods!"

"He's broken out again!"

"What a man!"

These are a representative selection of the exclamations which welcomed the notice that Shankland, the school idiot, inventor, author, and nearly everything else, had just pinned on his study door. It read:

THE SHANKLAND DETECTIVE AGENCY

MYSTERIES UNRAVELLED

CRIMINALS RUN TO EARTH

INQUIRIES CONDUCTED

APPLY WITHIN

TERMS MOD.

A howl of derision came from the crowd in the corridor. They knew Shanks of old.

"Mysteries unravelled," chortled Billy Malbury, the school's practical joke champion. "What price Padlock Sholmes?"

He elbowed his way through the herd of fags and thumped vigorously on the study door. For a minute there was no answer, and then Shanks's voice was heard, inviting him to come in. Malbury opened the door slightly and inserted his head.

"Why—what—ha! ha! ha!"

Malbury fell back into the crowd, choking with mirth. Eager to discover the cause of his merriment the rest of the juniors surged into the study.

Before a looking-glass hanging on the far wall, stood a weird

figure. That it was Shankland they had no doubt. He was clad in a long raincoat that reached nearly to his ankles, and a soft felt hat was pulled down over his eyes. From his chin hung a long beard of snowy whiteness, while a moustache to match adhered crookedly to his upper lip. He glared wrathfully at the intruders, who were, of course, in ecstasies of uproarious joy.

"Perhaps you will explain the cause of your unmannerly intrusion," said the figure.

"Good old Shanks," laughed Morley; "in training for a sleuth—eh—what?"

"I certainly hope to improve considerably on the methods of Scotland Yard," returned Shankland, with a dignity which he deemed necessary for his new rôle.

He was evidently prepared for any emergency. On the study table were handcuffs, two huge magnifying glasses, a box of grease paints, and an open book. Malbury picked up the book and read out the title: *Modern Murderers: their Habits and Haunts*.

The chortle which greeted this was too much for Shanks. The movement of his hand in the direction of a heavy ebony ruler was the signal for a general stampede, for when Shankland ran amok someone generally got hurt. Unfortunately, on this occasion the way to safety was barred by the hefty form of Mr. Cummings, the sports master.

Although Shaftesbury Cummings had been at Rockholt only a few weeks, he was already the most unpopular master in the school. When the ten-boy-power mass of humanity hit him in the midriff, he sat down violently and swore. The deepest of his feeling thus expressed, he looked round.

"Malbury—Morley—Richards—Tompkins," he rapped out. The rest had made good their escape.

"We're very sorry, sir," said Malbury. "We didn't know that you were passing."

"I should hope not," said Cummings sarcastically. "But there is no excuse for such ruffianly conduct. You will take five hundred lines each."

Having brushed his clothes down, he passed on, leaving the four unfortunates looking at one another glumly.

"Five hundred!" gasped Tompkins. "What a hog the man is!"

"It isn't as if he was any good at games," said Malbury. "It beats me how he was appointed sports master."

"Big stiff!" said Morley.

"He shall pay for this day's work," said Malbury dramatically, as Morley and he stalked off together with linked arms, discussing means of squaring their account with the new master.

Returning from practice the following day, they came upon Shankland on hands and knees in a corner of the quad. He was minutely examining an ancient ham-bone, probably deposited there by one of the local cats.

"No!" he was saying to himself. "It's not human."

"Crime slack to-day?" questioned Morley, trying to keep a straight face.

"Ahem!" said Shanks, embarrassed. "I'm beginning to think the crime wave is on the wane."

The two chums passed on, smiling broadly.

"Full many a flower is born to blush unseen," quoted Morley.

"You're right," said Malbury thoughtfully. "It's a shame that poor Shanks won't have a chance of showing his real ability."

Morley looked at his chum quickly. It was unlike Malbury to show so much consideration. He thought he detected a twinkle in his eye.

"For instance?" he questioned.

"A big burglary or——"

"Yes?"

"A fat, juicy murder."

Morley looked at him with understanding.

"Come in here," he said, as they passed the Fifth Form classroom, "and we'll talk it over."

It was a quarter of an hour later when they emerged. Judging by their beaming smiles the conclave had had a satisfactory result.

II

✱ When Malbury benevolently embarked on the task of providing a crime for the unsuspecting Shankland, he had not



T. W. HOLMES.

Several moth-eaten and very dirty sacks

bargained on outside help. It was on the following morning that the news of the big robbery reached the school. Malbury was in the quad when Smith minor brought the tidings and he immediately decided to make use of it. Chance had played into his hands.

During the night Belfield Manor had been entered by an armed and masked thief, who, after seriously wounding the head butler, had decamped with a quantity of valuable plate. The police had no clue to the burglar's identity, but were convinced that he was hiding in the vicinity. The roads and railway stations were zealously watched for suspicious strangers.

Hurrying from morning classes, Shankland had to pass by Mr. Cummings's study. He had just drawn level with the door when a small folded piece of paper attracted his attention.

Stooping, he picked it up. It was the merest scrap of paper, unaddressed, but bearing the startling words:

PLATE IN STUDY—SUIT-CASE
A WAITING GAME WILL PAY

and it was signed by the single initial C.

It could only mean one thing—the plate referred to was the loot from the manor. The thief was an inmate of the school!

Shanks breathed hard—a case at last! Now he would be able to utilize his amazing powers of deduction.

He looked at the initial that formed the letter's signature, and then at Cummings's door. The connection was too obvious to be mere coincidence.

"Aha!" he murmured, "the game is up, my friend."

Then, carefully pocketing the note, he moved with cat-like tread down the passage. Had he not been so absorbed with "the case", he might have heard a snort of stifled laughter that came from the door of the Fifth Form classroom.

"My boy," said Morley admiringly, "you're a genius."

To which Malbury modestly replied: "I know that, fathead."

When Shankland was safely out of the way, the pair emerged, and strolled down the corridor with as innocent an expression as they could muster. In the seclusion of their study they suddenly became active. From a corner of the room Morley produced a rather dilapidated suit-case, which he proffered for his chum's inspection.

"Splendid," said Malbury. "It's the image of Cummings's. Where did you lift it from?"

"Top bedroom," answered Morley laconically. "Sneaked it down while the chaps were at morning classes."

"I wondered what was the cause of your sudden bilious attack," said his chum.

The suit-case was opened and placed on the table. Inside were several moth-eaten and very dirty sacks.

"Just the thing," said Malbury. "Now then, produce the plate."

Obediently, Morley dived into another corner of the study and brought to light several substantial-looking pieces of crockery.

"Had a fearful job smuggling these in from the village."

"Better shove in a few cups and saucers to fill up."

The plates were thickly swathed in sacking and deposited in the suit-case. When it was full, the case was locked and the two conspirators prepared for the next move in the game.

Morley strolled out of the study to reconnoitre. It was Wednesday and most of the school were on the playing pitches. From the passage window he detected the unpopular sports master looking on at the practice. Things could not have been more propitious. He hurried back to the study. "Now's our chance," he said. "The coast is clear."

It was the work of a minute to carry the suit-case along the corridor and down the stairs. They reached their destination without mishap. Once inside Cummings's room they breathed more freely. They knew that he would not be up from the playing fields for at least an hour.

Gingerly they lifted the sports master's suit-case from the bottom of the bed and replaced it with their own. Then they slipped into the corridor and bore down on the boxroom, carrying the other case.

"By Jove, it's heavy," said Malbury. "I wonder what's in it."

Having thrown it amongst the worn-out trunks and portmantaux that littered the room, they shook hands solemnly. They were indeed geniuses.

As they strolled back along the corridor, they saw a strange figure slinking stealthily in the direction of Cummings's study. No second glance was necessary to see who it was. Even the wig, frock-coat, false moustache, and blue spectacles could not conceal his identity.

The two chums doubled up in silent mirth. Their plot was succeeding beyond all expectations. Shanks's leg was being thoroughly pulled, and Cummings would have some trouble in getting back his suit-case.

Meanwhile, Shankland had entered Cummings's room and discovered the case. He produced from his pocket a ponderous

bunch of keys and began to try them in the lock, one by one. In this way five minutes passed.

Suddenly his blood ran cold, for he heard a slight noise in the room behind him. He turned his head slowly to find his worst fears realized. Close at his back stood Mr. Cummings!

How he had managed to enter the room so noiselessly Shanks could not imagine, but he saw by the ugly look on the sports master's face that a crisis had arrived. He opened his mouth to shout for help, but before a sound had passed his lips Cummings had sprung on him and dragged him to the ground. A sock was pushed into his mouth and secured by a towel firmly tied around his head. Shankland was powerless against the strength of the sports master. His legs and arms were fastened, and he was bundled unceremoniously under the big double bed.

His field of vision being rather restricted, Shankland could only surmise what happened next. He saw Cummings's feet move across the bedroom in the direction of the suit-case, which suddenly rose out of sight. Then the legs moved off quickly towards the door. Shankland noticed how quietly the master closed it. He heard his footsteps die away down the corridor.

The captive 'tec writhed in impotent rage. The thought that he was lying helpless while a self-acknowledged thief was flying from justice was too much for him, but after a quarter of an hour of squirming he was forced by exhaustion to abandon his efforts. Cummings had done his work too well.

III

Shankland's absence was first noticed at call-over. It was generally supposed that he had gone to Belfield and had been delayed there. Malbury and Morley knew better, and looked at each other questioningly. When bedtime arrived with still no sign of the missing boy, they began to feel worried. Since the early afternoon they had seen nothing either of him or of Cummings.

The Head was informed by Spragson, the House master, and immediately formed search-parties, recruited from the Fifth and Sixth Forms. For several hours they scoured the neighbourhood

in vain. Inquiries in the town showed that no one answering to Shanks's description had been seen. At the railway station Spragson very nearly came to blows with the venerable old station-master.

"No," said the official, "I ain't seen none of the boys, but I seen one of the masters—a Mr. Cummings, I thinks—a-getting on the London express."

"Nonsense, man," said Spragson irritably. "You're dreaming. It couldn't have been Mr. Cummings."

"But I bain't dreaming," said the station-master, highly indignant; "it was him. He were carrying an old suit-case—very agitated, he seemed."

Mr. Spragson snorted and stamped off, the search-party trailing behind him. Malbury and Morley were the last to leave the station.

"What hornets' nest have we raised now?" said Morley.

"Search me!" answered his chum, trying to treat the matter lightly.

On the way back to the school Malbury edged up alongside the House master.

"Since all the likely places have failed to reveal anything, sir," he said, "why not try the unlikely places?"

The House master looked at him questioningly.

"I mean, why not search the school?"

Mr. Spragson thought this rather a good idea and the party split up into sections, each detailed to a part of the school buildings. The two practical jokers managed to get among those that were to search the School House.

"We can find out if that really was Cummings at the station," said Morley, as they passed the sports master's room.

Mr. Spragson nodded and rattled the door-knob vigorously. They listened breathlessly, but there was no answer. The House master opened the door and entered, the rest of the party crowding in after him.

He was gazing round the room with interest, when he suddenly received a violent kick in the region of the left calf. He glared round wrathfully, but to his amazement there was no one behind him. In fact his back was towards the bed. Then, suddenly dropping his eyes, he met with the extraordinary spectacle of a



He glared round wrathfully

pair of bound legs protruding from underneath it. The legs were bent at the knee and poised to deliver another kick. With a cry of alarm the master grabbed hold of them and hauled their owner from his place of rest. It was the unhappy Shanks!

He was half suffocated by his gag, but he managed to splutter out his story. A few minutes later, the Head was in communication with Belfield Police Station. The result of much comparison of notes and official data was to identify Cummings as a notorious London cracksman. His credentials were apparently forged.

Meanwhile, the two geniuses, Malbury and Morley, were in possession of knowledge both interesting and amusing. Cummings, the thief, was flying from Belfield with a suit-case full of broken china! While the police were endeavouring to trace an imaginary

confederate, the loot was lying in the boxroom not fifty paces from the Headmaster's study.

"We've put our foot in it, old bean," said Morley; "what shall we do?"

"We daren't explain things," answered Malbury. "The Head's pet hate is the practical joker."

In the end it was he that found a way out of the difficulty. From the boxroom window he lowered the suit-case to the waiting Morley, who immediately dived with it into the belt of trees that surrounded the quadrangle. He was joined a few seconds later by his chum, and the two helped one another over the wall into the road. About a hundred yards from the school they struck off across the fields in the direction of Belfield. Just outside the town they came to the railway line. There, a few feet from the permanent way, they dropped the suit-case. For five minutes they strolled round admiring the scenery, before returning to express surprise at finding a suit-case alongside the railway line. At the last minute Morley was smitten by conscience.

"I—I say," he said, "isn't it rather like acting a lie?"

"Rot," said Malbury, whose father is a lawyer, "It's an —er—er—legal fiction."

They made a triumphant entry into the school. Together with Shankland they were joint heroes for at least a week. The Second Form kids derived great enjoyment from pointing them out to the townspeople.

"Look," they would say, "those are the chaps that found the loot."

"And we don't deserve a bit of praise," said Morley.

"Neither does Shankland — though he doesn't know it," replied Malbury consolingly.

A few weeks later Cummings was arrested in London and brought to trial. More than enough evidence was forthcoming to prove his guilt, though certain unusual features of the case remained shrouded in mystery. Nothing was ever heard of the confederate whose note had led to the discovery of the loot, and it is doubtful if anyone was more mystified during the trial than Cummings himself.

BASIL BRINGS IT OFF

By K. NELSON ABBOTT

"Awfully rotten luck for you, Basil old chap, after all we've planned—I'll give up being a Scout and spend my Saturday afternoons with you as I used to," said Norman, kicking his legs as he sat on the edge of the table, looking down on the delicate form of his friend stretched on the couch, one leg in a stiff boot and irons.

"Don't be an ass—of course you must go on with your Scouting, I shall be able to join next year, the Doctor says. My leg ought to be quite strong by then—I only want to know what sort of things you learn—perhaps I could practise some of them lying here, then I shouldn't be so much behind the other chaps when I join up."

"Well," said Norman vaguely, gazing up at the ceiling. "We learn all about fixing up a camp—cooking, and washing up—and er—noticing and observing things."

"What sort of things?" asked Basil eagerly.

"Oh, I don't know exactly—paths through woods—so that we could find our way back, and whether anyone has been there before—and er—the habits of birds, and animals, and all sorts of things—I'm no good at explaining, but——"

"Would it help me if I practised observing? On this couch by the window, for instance. Suppose I had a notebook and wrote down a description of everyone who passed—how would that be?" asked Basil excitedly.

"Jolly good idea," said Norman, pleased to see his friend so interested. "Then when the weather is a bit warmer, I could take you into the park or on the common and you could sit there and observe. It will make a change from reading. Yes, you try it, old man. I'll go out and buy you a notebook now."

• Basil's leg had never been quite straight, but lately it had been operated on successfully. Now he had to lie for hours each day on the couch by the window, and the time dragged so. He read

for a bit, but soon tired of it. This new idea had distinct possibilities, and the fascination of it grew upon him.

The house was in a quiet road near the common, and he found it quite easy to make some sort of note of each person who passed, except school hours, when a whole crowd of children would come along at once. But these he soon got to know by sight, and he amused himself by making up names for them. There was "The Hardy Norseman" who rushed along the road on roller skates, without a hat, his mop of yellow hair blowing in the wind. Or "Alice in Wonderland" a little girl who mooned along without looking where she was going, and was always tripping over something. Then there was the "Letter-box", a stiff little boy in a scarlet jersey, who walked with his mouth wide open.

It was the coming of spring that brought new life and ideas to Basil. When the weather grew warmer Norman took him on to the common, and there he found plenty to observe. The opening of the primrose buds, the yellow of the gorse bushes, and the song of the lark, were a continual delight after the hours spent indoors.

Strolling along one afternoon they found a topping "hidie-hole", a tunnel running through a dense mass of bushes. Next time they came they brought a rug, cushion, and a basket of provisions, and had a picnic there. It was a splendid hiding-place, as the bracken grew thickly outside the opening and hid them from anyone passing along the road that crossed the common.

Basil was sitting there alone one evening. Norman had arranged to call for him at "The Den" about six, and take him home. Something must have kept him, as Basil could tell by the sun that it must be later than that. He was just gathering up his crutches to start off by himself, when a man came along and flung himself down on the bracken just in front of the den. Basil crawled farther inside, as he didn't want to be seen and give away their hidie-hole. Then he seized his notebook and proceeded to write down a description of the man. "Tall—white hair—red face—black moustache and eyebrows—distinguished looking—grey clothes—carrying heavy overcoat (can't see the colour because he is sitting on it)—light grey Homburg hat."

Just then a car appeared coming down the road, with three

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men in it. They were evidently friends of the white-haired man, for, as the car came nearer, he stood up and waved his hand. The chauffeur left the road and brought the car to a standstill on the edge of the patch of bracken.

Basil noted the number and description of the car, which was a very ordinary one; then he was struck by the queer conversation of the men.

"Got 'em?" asked the white-haired man.

"Bet yer life!" answered one of the other men, as he got out of the car; and Basil noticed he had a slight limp, and a scar on his left cheek.

"Easy as kiss yer 'and; 'ere yer are, boss," and he handed a small canvas bag to the white-haired man.



"Got 'em?"

"Might 'ave been easy for you—but they was pretty near lettin' daylight inter me," grumbled one of the others, taking off his brown cap and putting his finger through a hole in it. Then he stuffed it into his pocket and took out a grey one, put it on and strolled off. "So long—boys—see you 11.30 at the usual," he called out over his shoulder.

"If it was as near as that I'd better hurry," said the grey-haired man, as he got into the car. "All right there?" he asked of the others. One was looking into the engine, while the other stooped over the back of the car.

"Right," he called out, standing aside. The other slammed down the bonnet, and the car started off with only the white-haired man inside. The other two walked off quickly in different directions across the common.

As the car drove off, Basil noticed the number plate—then he glanced at his notes—yes, it had been altered! He hastily scribbled down the new number. Then he breathed a sigh of relief—he was shaking all over—suppose they had seen him—what would they have done?

Evidently they had committed a burglary of some sort. He ought to let the police know what he had heard. But he could not walk far alone even with his crutches, and a policeman was seldom seen on the common. Still he could look out for one.

He crawled from the den, and stood up in the bracken. No one was in sight except the two men in the distance, while the car was climbing the hill on the left by the golf links. Basil made for the road and trudged on till he heard the clatter of a motor-cycle behind him. He turned, waved and shouted to the man as he came nearer. Then an awful thought struck him—this might be another of the gang—he came from the same direction as the car. However, he felt reassured when he heard the man's voice, it sounded so bright and cheerful.

"Well, what is it, sonny?" he called out, as he slowed up. "Want a lift home?"

Basil poured out his story as quickly as he could. "Will you tell a policeman about it?" he asked breathlessly.

The cyclist looked at him suspiciously. "Well, that's a queer

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story," he said doubtfully. "Are you sure you didn't go to sleep over a detective yarn, and dream it all?"

"Quite sure; besides I have written it all down, I couldn't have done *that* in my sleep," said Basil firmly, as he showed him the notebook.

The cyclist thought a minute. "The best plan would be for you to come along to the local police station. The police would know there if a burglary had taken place, and probably your descriptions would be useful. Could you manage on this seat behind? It's quite well padded—or would the jolting hurt your leg?"

"Oh yes, I could ride on there all right!" said Basil.

The cyclist lifted him up. "I think you will find that quite comfortable. I had it made for my own kiddie," he said, as he buckled the strap. The next minute they were off.

Basil felt thrilled with excitement—he had never travelled so fast before—except in a train. The road simply flew away from them, and it seemed no time before they drew up at the police station.

Mr. Henderson, the cyclist, asked to see the Inspector, and they were shown into a room. Basil told his story, and then produced his observation book. The Inspector glanced through it. Then with the book still in his hand he went into another room, and they could hear him ringing up on the telephone.

Presently he returned and sat down at the table opposite Basil.

"Now, youngster," he said kindly, "what was your object in writing down descriptions like this—do you mean to become a reporter when you grow up—or a detective?"

"No," replied Basil. "I never thought of being a detective, although I should like to be able to write, but why I started making observations was because I want to be a Scout as soon as I am stronger, and they are taught to notice things—so I thought I would practise what I could now."

"Well, it's lucky for us that you were on the spot this evening. We had just received the 'phone message about the burglary before you came in. Over £2000 worth of jewels have been stolen from Hartley Manor. A fancy-dress ball had been arranged for to-night, and Lady Hartley was to be Queen Elizabeth. There

was a large house party—they had dinner earlier than usual, and were to get into fancy dress after.

“While they were at dinner the maid had the jewellery all spread out on the dressing-table—it seems she was fixing some of them on to the bodice of the dress her ladyship was to wear—when a man appeared at the open window; the maid said he had something dark over his mouth, and held what looked like a tennis ball in his hand. She tried to scream, but he held up his arm and immediately she felt a pricking, burning sensation in her throat and eyes, and she knew no more. One of the other maids, who wanted to borrow something, came into the room and found the girl unconscious on the floor; and, on going to her assistance, started feeling giddy herself. She made for the door and gave the alarm. The house party went in all directions—some to the grounds, and one of the guests saw a man just disappearing over the garden wall. He climbed the wall—it was thick with ivy—and saw a car just making off. He shouted to them to stop, and then fired. He thought he hit someone but couldn’t be sure. However, he noticed the number of the car, and it was the same as the first one in your book. I have ’phoned the station at Roughend, where the car seemed to be making for, and given the new number and your description of the white-haired man. I hope we shall soon hear of his capture.”

“Then do you think the burglar threw a gas bomb into the room?” asked Mr. Henderson.

“I don’t think he *threw* it,” replied the Inspector. “I should say he had the gas, or some sort of poison, in a small receptacle like a scent spray—or he might, by squeezing the rubber ball in his hand, eject it from a flask in his pocket—evidently the covering round his mouth was to protect himself in case of leakage. There have been one or two cases of the sort lately, where the person in charge of valuables has been rendered unconscious from a short distance. But now, youngster,” turning to Basil with a smile, “we shall have more chance of catching him, thanks to your description of the scar and the limp.”

“The limp was only very slight—only that he seemed to trust more to one foot than the other,” said Basil.

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Just then the telephone bell rang in the next room. The Inspector went to answer it, and was away some minutes.

When he returned his manner had quite changed, and he appeared very stern and angry.

"Look here, youngster," he began, flinging the notebook on the table. "Have you been pulling my leg over all this? Let me tell you it's not safe to joke with the police—you may find yourself in serious trouble—now let's have the truth."

"What do you mean?" said Basil, roused to indignation at his change of tone. "I have been telling the truth all along."

"They have rung up from Roughend," said the Inspector, turning to Mr. Henderson, "to say there must be some mistake. They found the man I described dining at the club, with the car numbered as you said, waiting outside. They arrested him—and there was an awful fuss—it seems he is Sir James McKairn—a retired colonel very well known in the neighbourhood."

"But don't important men commit crimes sometimes?" broke in Basil.

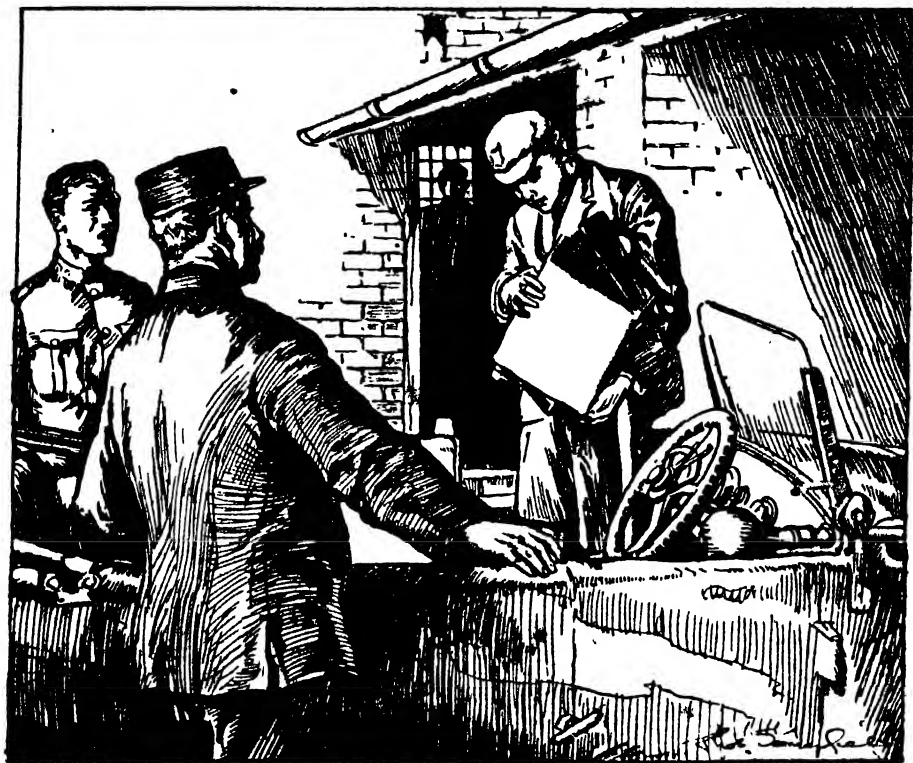
"It has been known, certainly. But there is evidently some mistake in this case," said the Inspector, drumming his fingers on the table. "There'll be no end of a rumpus over the arrest—you must come with me to Roughend, and see if you can identify the man. Will you come too, Mr. Henderson?"

"Yes, I'd like to hear the end of it."

"It will be some time before I hear the end of it—I'm afraid," muttered the Inspector.

As Basil was being rushed along in the Inspector's car, he went over in his mind all that had happened. Was there anything he had forgotten that might be of importance? Yes, there was something the white-haired man called out just as the car started—whatever was it? He had been so surprised to see the new number on the car that he had not taken much notice—"If I'm nabbed—if I'm nabbed"—whatever was the rest of it? Something about Mike—"If I'm nabbed—send Mike—send Mike for the tin" that was it! What tin—what ever could it mean?

They drew up at the Roughend Police Station. A policeman standing on the steps came forward to open the door. The



A queer petrol tin

Inspector alighted, strode up the steps, and entered a room on the right, Basil hopping after him. A man was seated at a table. "I say, this is an awkward business—" he began, but the Inspector interrupted him.

"Where is Sir James?" he asked.

A policeman opened a door into another room, and the Inspector walked through, signing to Basil to follow.

The white-haired man was walking hastily up and down the room, his face almost purple with anger.

"Good evening, Sir James," said the Inspector. "Now, Basil, have you ever seen this gentleman before?"

"Are *you* the person who is responsible for this disgraceful outrage?" thundered Sir James. "A man of *my* position—*my*

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standing—arrested in his own club. What the deuce do you mean by it, sir?—I demand an apology—I——!”

There was a commotion in the room behind them, and a clear voice rang out: “What is this I hear—my father arrested! Are you all mad, Jacobs?” and a young man burst into the room.

“Father——” he began—then he stopped and broke into a laugh. “So it’s *you*, is it, Johnstone—been at your old tricks again, eh?”

“This man was my father’s valet at one time,” he said, turning to the Inspector. “He disappeared suddenly—and several of our valuables went with him. It’s not the first time he has masqueraded as Sir James. I congratulate you on his capture.”

Basil heaved a sigh of relief. But he was still worried about the tin.

“May I have a look at the car?” he asked.

“Certainly, my boy,” said the Inspector. “Here, show this lad the car.”

A policeman led Basil into a yard where the car was standing.

He stood and gazed at it. “If I’m nabbed, send Mike for the tin,” he said to himself.

“Tin.” Why! *petrol tin!* that was it. There were three of them in the car. Basil took up the first—it was quite empty. The next was full, and the third one seemed to be full too, but the stopper looked strange, and when he tried to remove the cork—it wouldn’t budge. He turned the tin upside down. It looked quite ordinary—but he noticed there was a dent about the size of a farthing at one side. He placed his finger on it, and pressed hard. The bottom of the tin flew up like the lid of a box, and inside was the canvas bag!

Basil took it out and handed it silently to the Inspector, who had followed him. The Inspector untied the string and plunged his hand into the bag, bringing it out full of sparkling stones.

“Well,” he said, patting Basil on the back, “you’d better come into the force as soon as you’re big enough.”

And that was the beginning of the strange friendship between the Police Inspector and the little lame boy.



A HUNDRED-DOLLAR MOOSE

By PERCY DENT

"I'll give one hundred dollars to the man who brings in the first spring moose," said David Smythe, the muscular proprietor of the Telford Creek roadhouse.

Telford was one of the many creeks that flow into the Stewart River; which in turn joins the Yukon, 70 miles from Dawson City. At its mouth stood the unpretentious hostelry known as Smythe's roadhouse.

Built solidly of nicely peeled logs, against a background of heavy spruce timber and the precipitous heights of rocky mountain ridges, it presented a not unfavourable picture of the wild North West.

A Hundred-dollar Moose

The interior had been arranged with an eye to business, for it was partitioned off to accommodate conveniently a score of guests, and it afforded board and lodgings for casual hunters, prospectors, and gold stampeders, as well as supplying provisions to miners working on the creek.

Smythe was lolling rather than sitting in a wide basket-chair in what he called the "debate" room, and several miners—who had dropped in in expectation of meeting the first boat up from Dawson after the break-up of the ice that had held the great rivers of the Yukon captives since October—were in attendance.

"That's a pretty generous offer, Smythe," said a burly logger, glancing idly through an old magazine, "and when this boat comes in to-day, I'll try my marksmanship in the hills to-morrow."

"Where do I come in, Smythe?" said Jimmy Sanders, a young boy still in his teens, suddenly extricating himself from a soiled picture paper. "Will you let me in on the deal?"

"How do you mean, boy?"

"Why, would you give me a hundred dollars if I were to bring in a moose?"

"Sure thing! My larder is running very low, and if some of you fellows don't get out and shoot me a moose or two, it will be up to me to take to the trail myself. It is the middle of May, the snow is mostly off the lower divides, and moose should be running everywhere."

"Consider that hundred dollars booked, Smythe," broke in another miner. "I'm expecting a bunch of mail on this boat, or I would get out to-day."

"I'd like to get that hundred dollars myself," continued Jimmy Sanders thoughtfully; "but the fact is, I don't know the first thing about big game shooting."

"Getting time you did," replied Smythe in a tone of reproof.

"I haven't got a gun."

"Been in the country six months and never looked through the sights of a rifle! Jimmy, you ought to be ashamed of yourself. Here! take my gun and try your luck on the Thistle Divide. If you don't get a moose up there, it will be time for you to see an eye specialist." And he laughed.

"Better keep away from the Thistle Divide," said the logger, winking at Smythe. "Some pretty tough Indians in that district, and it wouldn't surprise me if they mistook you for a cub bear, and potted you off."

"Wolves too," spoke up another loungee. "I remember hunting up there once——"

"Yes—I can remember it, too," laughed Jimmy. "But you can't scare me that way."

Jimmy took the gun and made his way home. He certainly was not used to handling fire-arms, and as for big game shooting, he hardly knew the difference between a bear and a jack rabbit! His knowledge of the country was very limited, too, for he had worked hard all the winter and had had no time to go hunting.

As a matter of fact, Jimmy had run away from his home in Vancouver. News of the thrilling wild life led by men in the Yukon had so saturated his mind that he could no longer content himself running errands and book-keeping for his father. Realizing that his parents would never consent to his leaving home for the Arctic country, he had taken the only remaining course—he had run away.

Boarding the first Pacific coast steamer as a juvenile deck hand, he enjoyed the thrilling experience of a voyage to Skagway, Alaska, whence he had worked his way down the Yukon River as far north as the Stewart River country. There he had persuaded Smythe, of Telford Creek, to find him work for the winter. The bulky roadhouse proprietor, rather taken with the boy's willingness to work, had given him a contract to chop down and saw into convenient logs as many spruce trees as he cared to fell during the winter.

Spring had come with the usual cloudless skies and southerly winds, which are a notable feature of the Yukon summer season, and with it he was conscious of a yearning to return to his home in Vancouver, and tell them of the strenuous life in the Klondyke, at the same time determined to return north the following autumn.

There was one great obstacle—want of money. He had made a few dollars on the Smythe wood contract, but he required at

A Hundred-dollar Moose

least another 150 dollars—perhaps more—to pay for his passage back to Vancouver. He might work his way back, but so many offered their services to the captains of the river boat in return for a free passage to the “Outside” every spring, he was doubtful of success.

So that when Smythe broadcasted his offer of one hundred dollars for the first spring moose, Jimmy made up his mind to “take a shot at it” as he put it. Tidying up his cabin and carefully examining and polishing the gun Smythe had lent him, he finally fell asleep and dreamed of monster moose falling victims to his wonderful marksmanship.

At daybreak he stepped out on to the trail and headed for the rather forbidding-looking Thistle Divide. On his back sat comfortably a pack holding food, extra boxes of cartridges and other small equipment; his cartridge belt glistening with ammunition and a formidable hunting knife, a revolver obstructing entry to his hip pocket, and Smythe’s rifle carried in his right hand, one would hardly have recognized him for the city boy of six months ago.

“I’ll show those fellows what’s what in these hills, see if I don’t!” he grinned, as he ploughed through the heavy bush. “I’d hate to be the moose to come within reaching distance of this old scrap-iron gun of Smythe’s. But I must make no mistake in shooting from the right end of it!”

Most of the snow on the lower hills was gone, and the higher he climbed the drier became the ground. But in places the bush was very thick, and the boy found it frequently necessary to make wide detours to escape entanglement with dense clusters of willows and uprooted trees.

As he neared the summit the scenery became magnificent—wonderfully formed domes, rocky snow-capped ridges, and spire-like peaks towering one above another as far as the eye could see. Below lay the sinuous creek, here and there enveloped in shadow where protruding ridges temporarily obstructed the sun’s rays.

He was suddenly conscious of and a little startled at what seemed to him the rapid approach of some animal. Darting into cover,

Jimmy stood and waited for the coming disturbance to show itself. Drawing his revolver as an easier weapon for defence than the heavy rifle, he kept his eyes in the direction where the strange noise was manifesting itself. Almost immediately a small deer-like animal dashed into view and rushed towards him. Stopping opposite the bush where Jimmy was standing, it turned and looked back along the trail, every muscle twitching with fright.

Hardly knowing what he did, Jimmy sprang out upon the quivering little beast, and, throwing his arms round its neck, they both fell to the ground. Small as the deer was, it put up a great fight for freedom, and it was as much as Jimmy could do to win the fight. But after a few minutes of desperate wrestling, he managed to get a rope round its head, and, springing to his feet, tied it securely to a tree.

"Gee whiz!" he exclaimed joyfully, as he stood surveying his restless captive, "if I haven't caught a young moose, and a fine looking little chap too! Although you will entitle me to claim Smythe's hundred dollars, I'm just a bit doubtful about being able to part with you."

The baby moose bleated like a lamb, rubbed its head against the tree, and pawed the ground, impatient to get away.

"No," continued Jimmy, his tone full of sympathy for the helpless little creature, "the more I look at you, master moose, the less I like the thought of giving you up to Smythe. But you are a moose, you know, and I must make some kind of a deal. Perhaps some one will buy you for a pet."

An interruption came in the form of a young Indian, who stood before the boy apparently from nowhere.

"Hello, Jock; I didn't hear you knock!" said Jimmy by way of introduction, a broad grin on his face.

"What for you laugh, you seely Paleface. You tink so I easy mask—wide open. Tink I no see?"

"What's the matter with you, Jock?"

"You no tek heem," pointing to the moose.

"Sure I shall."

The Indian boy shook his head.

"Na," he said, "heem belonga me. I follow long trail, long

time gone. Heem run, I run, you catch—all same belonga Indian."

"I can't see your argument."

"I tink so you no see moose bymby, eit'her."

The young "buck" made a movement suggestive of releasing the animal. Jimmy instantly put himself in the way and warned the Red boy to keep clear of it.

"Look here, Jock, better make tracks while you are in one piece. This baby moose is my property. I'll fight." And taking up a pugilistic attitude, he confronted the native boy with a pretty solid defence.

"You heep lie," went on the Indian. "You I club thump!" He brandished a cudgel so threateningly that Jimmy deemed it wise to set upon the Red boy for the purpose of his own protection. The native retaliated; they came to grips; a violent struggle ensued, the combatants rolling and kicking on the ground like juvenile gladiators. Shouts and hideous yells filled the air, brushwood was flattened, saplings were smashed to the ground like matchwood—the scene was one of thrilling action, a typical backwoods brawl.

After the loss of much breath and voice, Jimmy got the upper hand, and commenced to drag his victim towards a slope that would have sent the Red boy rolling down yards into a mass of dense bush, but the young Indian managed to break loose, and with a cat-like bound was away along the trail at lightning speed.

"That's the second scrap in a few minutes," gasped Jimmy, knocking the soil off his torn clothes. Then, addressing the baby moose, he said: "Young fellow, you owe me a sled load of thanks for saving you from that Red guy's clutches. He wouldn't have treated you with an overdose of courtesy. Come on; guess we'd better be getting back to camp before that scoundrel comes back with a dozen of his fathers and mothers."

At a brisk pace Jimmy led the way home, the little creature trotting behind at the end of a rope. Reaching the creek flat, they were the recipient of much boisterous jocularly hurled after them by the miners as they passed by their cabins. Several half-breed wolf-dogs made repeated savage attacks on the little lamb-like moose, and were only beaten off with difficulty.

At sundown Jimmy led his captive up to Smythe's roadhouse, and tying it to the veranda, walked carelessly into the building.

"Smythe, I suppose that hundred dollar moose money is still unclaimed?"

"It is," replied the proprietor, without a glance at the boy, "and likely to be so far as you are concerned, I guess. You'll never win it hanging around my roadhouse."

"Why, I've been in the hills all day."

"And what did you get—a jack rabbit?" he said, with a chuckle.

"No—a moose."

"What!—you shoot a moose!" He laughed aloud at the very idea of it.

"No—I caught one alive."

"See here, boy; I've no time to listen to your foolery."

"It's no use, Smythe; might just as well begin paying me those hundred dollars. I'll have it all in one dollar bills if you don't mind. You'll find your moose tied to the handrail outside."

Smythe walked casually to the door; but when he saw the baby moose restlessly pawing the ground, his enthusiasm was mildly amusing to Jimmy. But when Smythe told the boy that a passenger on the up boat that had arrived during the day had expressed a desire to buy a young cub bear, or wolf, or even a baby moose at a good price, Jimmy could hardly contain himself.

"And here's the very man," said Smythe, as the person in question strolled up. "Here, you, Mr. Aish; here's the baby moose you were asking for an hour ago."

Mr. Aish was delighted, and stroked the little animal caressingly. "I'd like to take this little fellow back to Dawson. How much do you want for him, boy?"

"What will you give?"

"Two hundred and fifty dollars down."

"It's yours."

A week later, when the river steamer called in on its way back to Dawson City, Jimmy Sanders stepped on board as passenger to Vancouver, his pockets heavy with nearly 400 dollar bills.

"Good-bye all," he shouted, as the boat drew away; "but I'll be back again in the autumn sure."

RUNNING THE OLD SCHOOL MAG

By E. TALBOT.

Ferrers's pater had been a Bede's chap in years gone by. "Absolutely corking, my pater's brain is," Ferrers told me, "and"—here the chap looked a trifle depressed—"he was responsible for starting the mag, you know."

There was a reason why Ferrers should look depressed. The School Mag was, at that time, a joke, and a byword, and an absolute frost.

"I almost made a blinking ass of myself on the first day of coming to Bede's," said Ferrers to me, "and I'll explain how. I fairly bragged about my pater starting the mag. I soon noticed the chaps' grins."

"You would," said I.

For the Old School Mag was the last screech at Bede's. Not worth the twopence charged for it. Anyone edited it who could be got to edit it. And any kid who could get smacked into writing for it, wrote. Absolutely without funds it was, too; and the inkiest kids had to copy it out, making the most hideous blunders. It had a circulation of about one at that time, the one being Ferrers, as you may have guessed. All this was rotten for him, of course, his dad being nearly concerned, though I couldn't see why he was specially bothered about it at the very beginning of the cricket term.

• However I soon tumbled to that.

"My pater's coming home on leave," said Ferrers, "and I've got Bollins to give me the editorship, you see!"

Well, anybody would know that the mag would be in a fairly bad way if a middle school chap could get the editorship of it for the asking. I didn't say so, though, and Ferrers proceeded to explain.

"My notion is," said Ferrers, "that I'll send up the circulation. My pater's boat's due at mid-term, you see, and by then—seeing that he's so jolly keen on it——"

"How'll you manage it, old chap?" asked I, trying not to

damp his ardour by my tone. "It's not as though you've got the finances of the *Daily Mail*, you know."

Ferrers hadn't, as he agreed. On the other hand, he was prepared to plank down every jolly sou he had. "Chap's *do* read," said Ferrers, "at least I jolly well tell you they read the mag when my pater edited it. A corker it was; I've seen a number. He's got it still. A serial about Incas' Treasure; and a set of Tec Tales." Ferrer's tone changed. It sounded most awfully anxious. "And even in these days," said Ferrers, "*some* papers sell—I've studied the circulation-lists of 'iots of them. Well?"

"They've nearly all got insurances," said I, trying not to damp him.

"Then *we*'ll have an insurance," said Ferrers.

The light faded from his eyes, however, when I explained to him what might happen, in such case, if an epidemic struck Bede's. "Three pounds a week, old chap," said I, "to every one in the San."

"Rats!" said Ferrers. "I'll think the matter out,"

He did. Two days afterwards he came back with a face of flaming joy. "Look here, Heath," says he, "you know the mag?"

"Rather," says I.

"Well, I rather think the insurance stunt is off, but it's given me an idea. Treasure, now;—my three pounds would do it. I've had a brain-wave."

He had. There was no doubt about it. It was the best brain-wave I've heard. I began to think, for the first time, that something might be made of that mag if he persevered.

"Heard of Hidden Treasure?" said Ferrers.

"Hidden how much?" said I.

"Papers had it," so Ferrers said. "When I was a kid," he continued, "my aunt found some. It sent up the circulation of some papers, miles. People had to buy the paper, you see, and go treasure-hunting. The paper gave them clues. How to find the hiding-places. Well, then, if they were lucky they hit on a disc with words on it. My aunt found one of them 'This entitles you to half a crown!' Well, she got it, too."

"There might be something in it," said I; "but our chaps

Running the Old School Mag

wouldn't chase round much to find half a crown in this heat."

"No. But they would for the three pounds, of course," said Ferrers.

Well, that was the part that did make me sit up. It was a thundering good idea. "Discs?" said I. "How'll you get 'em?"

But discs weren't in it with old Ferrers.

"Not me," said he. "I tell you what I'll do. I'll make a single copy of the first number that appears under my editorship. It shall jolly well come out at once, and, owing to the fact that I've got no serials nor stories left with the good-will from Bollins, except some rotten jokes too stale for him to use, this is my notion. The first number shall be nothing more than a single sheet, and the chap who finds it will get the three pounds! How's that! And no chap may look for it unless he subscribes for the second number. I'll prepare a whole wad of receipt forms, and hand 'em round to any chaps who subscribe for it. Then we'll see where we are as regards circulation, and the second number will be due round about the time when the pater's likely to look me up."

Ferrers stopped for breath. I didn't wonder.

"But, how'll the chap find the sheet?" inquired I.

"I'll *lose* it, of course," explained Ferrers. "Hide it, I mean. Now do you twig?"

I did. It truly was a brain-wave; there was no doubt of that.

There was no doubt, either, of the ripping sensation that surrounded old Ferrers' next act. We got up the notice together, certainly, but the red ink and the capitals were his; and fine it looked hanging on the notice-board on the very next day.

THE OLD SCHOOL MAG (so it ran)

O Yez! O Yez! O Yez! Once again under the old Managership.

RALLY AROUND

As a tribute to its length of Life, the Editor proposes to inaugurate an ENTIRELY ORIGINAL CONTEST.

This sheet (of which there is no duplicate; never has been a duplicate, nor never will be) will, at Noon on the Eighteenth of the month of May, be removed from this notice-board.

THEN—

All chaps who are already subscribers to the SECOND number, are, by virtue of their subscription, i.e. threepence—to be paid on the nail in exchange for a printed receipt bearing the Editor's initials—qualified to enter the SEARCH for this said sheet, which, once removed by the hands of the Editor from the notice-board, will be hidden WITHIN BOUNDS. To the FINDER—whose only qualification shall be that, at the moment of finding, he be in possession of an initialed receipt form—will be awarded the sum of

THREE POUNDS.

O Yez! O Yez! O Yez!

God save the King!

They did rally round, too. Ferrers and I doled out receipt forms with merry hearts. As to Ferrers, when we'd raked in the coppers, I thought his smile would never come off.

"How's this to cheer up the pater?" said he. "A circulation of practically one hundred and fifty!"

"You'll have to give 'em something for their money," I reminded him; "already they're asking what the second number's going to be like."

"Meanwhile they've got the treasure hunt, haven't they? What else do they want for threepence?" asked Ferrers rather fiercely.

He didn't feel fierce for long, though; the school was growing too jolly keen over the matter. The place resounded with the cries of chaps who'd taken tickets and wanted to know further particulars; also with the ravings of chaps who'd lost their receipt forms and were forced to purchase others. With these last Ferrers was patient, as their loss meant his gain, seeing that they had to subscribe a second time.

The page would hang where it was, he explained to them all, till noon on Saturday, when—owing to the fact that he had an early dentist's exeat—it would disappear. And then the first bearer of a receipt form who discovered the page's whereabouts, would be the winner of the prize.

Running the Old School Mag

"Somebody's got to find it. Why not *you*?" remarked Ferrers to the school. It was only to me that he unfolded the secret of the spot where the sheet was to lie.

Just within bounds there is a patch of gorse. He meant to dig a hole under one of the bushes, and stuff the sheet in. Some chap or other would twig the spot before long, of course, but, as Ferrers said, they might as well have a bit of a run for their money. "Or *mine*!" added he, "Not that I'm begrudging it, though the fact that the whole of my cash will go, and that, also, as editor, it's up to me to make the second number a success, is rather preying on my mind. There's a hundred and fifty copies to do, too; and how? I need a type-writer, and I've seen a jolly advert for a remodelled one. Three pounds ten, it is, and if I could afford it, wouldn't things hum! Suppose no chap ever found the sheet?"

"They mean to," I told him; "they've spent their threepences, and they're as keen as hounds."

"Who could blame them? At twelve, when as arranged, on account of the dentist's exeat, Ferrers and I left the prep room, there wasn't a chap whose eyes didn't follow us. We went to the common room and took down the sheet. We were just on our way out, too, when Biggs, the school porter, came along.

"Mr. Norris 'as sent me for you, young gentlemen. You're in for it. You're to go to 'im just as soon as you're back from the dentist this morning."

"Righto, Biggs. Keep your hair on," said we.

But we rather marvelled as we set off. For what did old Noah want? He's our house-master, and he's got a frightful lot of weight at Bede's, having been there as long as the school. The wiggings and whackings always come via him. We were a trifle thoughtful as we made our way to the gorse-patch.

There, forgetting everything else, we prepared to do the deed, and it was at the identical moment when Ferrers was holding the sheet in his claws that a report went off, and a jolly tall flaring flame seemed to leap into the sky!

Then followed a fairly loud shot. "Hi! Water! Any help about!" roared a voice.



The fire was beaten

We absolutely forgot the treasure sheet. Ferrers declared afterwards that he laid it in a branch; I had no idea what happened to it. Evidently there was something very much wrong in the road near, and our help was needed. Off we flew.

No end of a decent chap was there; burst his bike's petrol-tank he had, and the whole thing was flaming. He'd ignited it somehow; smoking, I rather think, while he filled the tank. Anyway, I give you my word it was some pickle. But by the time Ferrers and I had brought tons of earth and thrown it over the blazing bike, the fire was beaten.

"There's a ten minutes for you!" said the bike's owner. "Thank you. Well, it's lucky for me that you two blew along."

It was those last words of his, so Ferrers said later, which suddenly caused him to remember. "Blew along!" Talk of blow-

ing—there was a fairly high wind blowing at the time, and where was his sheet? Ferrers suddenly turned green.

“What’s up?” asked the stranger, who was feeling much relieved, naturally, that he’d still got a few spokes of his bike left. “Whew-w!” said he, when he’d heard the tale. “I’ll come along and have a squint. We’ll run it to earth and get it hidden before your fellows come out.”

But even as he spoke, we saw the chaps racing out of school looking as keen as mustard and hot on the trail.

“Let ’em search. Won’t harm ’em,” said the stranger. “One of them may hit on it, you know. And then, all’s well.”

We had to, for we were late for the dentist’s as it was. On the way back, an hour later, we could hardly breathe with apprehension as we passed the field. But there they were, still at it, searching away.

“No one’s found it yet, anyway,” said Ferrers. “Well, we can’t do anything else, of course, till we’ve been in to see what Noah wants.”

To Noah’s room we went.

“Ah!” said Noah when he saw us.

His voice was fairly stern, but there was a sort of look behind his glasses that I couldn’t make head or tail of.

“This morning,” said Noah, “I had brought to me, by one of the housekeepers, an object which made me realize that here was something which must be *instantly* looked into. The laws of the land—” Here, old Noah, to our amazement, broke into a treatise on card-sharping and other low-down tricks. Then, after spouting for what seemed ages, he turned and stared at us. “According to the law of the land, rightly, yes rightly,” quoth Noah, “no raffle may be held. No lottery. They are forbidden as the thin end of the wedge. What do you say to *this*, then?”

As he brought out the last words, he thumped down on the table before us—an initialled receipt form!

We stared.

“I sent Biggs for you,” said Noah, “fearing that some underground system had got abroad amongst you. Then, while I was seated here, deliberating over the matter—what did I see? Through

my window, brought by a gust of wind—*this!* The second link in the chain!" Noah, from one of his bureau drawers, suddenly produced—the *treasure sheet!*

Ferrers, at this instant, gave a gasp of relief.

As for me, I sat dumb and watched Noah, and that was why, I suppose, I noticed that look in his eye once again. Likewise a change in his voice which was an omen of good to come.

"Shortly afterwards," continued Noah, "I happened to have a visitor. An old boy, Major Denny, whom, so it appears, the pair of you assisted in extinguishing his motor-bicycle close by. He told me the tale which, apparently, you had told him. It appears, Ferrers, that the reward money is to come from your own pocket; that it is, in fact, a gift, in your interest in the magazine, and this fact takes away the suggestion of the lottery-system altogether!" Suddenly old Noah grinned.

"Therefore I wish you well, Ferrers," said he. "May you make the paper as much of a success as did your father. And as, apparently, it seems that I, myself, am the rightful claimant of the prize—here he touched the receipt form and grinned again, "may I say, thanking you in advance, that I shall be pleased to receive it in *kind!* That, in fact, I shall be pleased to become *free* gratis and for nothing, in lieu of a three pound payment, a life subscriber to the Old School Mag."

It was posted up in hall that Noah had found the sheet. And the whole school cheered, for Noah's no end popular. Noah made a speech about it, too, and told the tale, and the circulation went up further still afterwards. It went up still further next day, for there came a request from Major Denny for copies for both him and a whole scree of Old Boys who remembered the beginning of the paper. Life members they wanted to be. Ferrers' three pounds went to the typing machine, of course, as he said it would. We have bags of absolutely top-hole features. The Old Mag's going strong. I ought to know, for it's Ferrers and me who are still running the OLD SCHOOL MAG!

A NARROW SQUEAK

By PATRICK WILLIAMSON

I instinctively disliked Tom Johnston the first time I saw him. We were sitting on the settee, Gregson ("Tabnabs" for short) and I, rolling cigarettes, when footsteps came down the ladder, and a bag was hurled into the cabin. Following the bag came a big fellow, cap over one eye, and chest bare.

"Hallo, fellows," he said. "I'm the new apprentice, Johnston. Who's senior?"

"I am," said I, staring at him.

"Oh, you are, are you?" he answered, as he deliberately sat down on my bunk and put his feet on it. "You are, are you?" and he spat neatly into the bucket. "Well, I'm just out of sail. Sail, my boys, not dirty old iron tanks, and I've got sailing-ship ways."

"And fo'c'sle manners too," said I, rising quickly. "Get out of that bunk, it's mine."

"All right, Mr. Cock-o'-the-Roost." Johnston lifted himself out with a glare at me. "I'm not one for a row—yet."

But from that moment it was war—open war—between us.

There was no denying Johnston's efficiency; two years in sail had made him quick and handy, such as we could never be.

The mate noticed this quick enough, which made another cause for bitterness. Warfare is an unpleasant state for three people herded in one room. I say three people, though Gregson, being only fifteen, scarcely counted. Fortunately, Johnston and I were in separate watches, or it might have burst sooner, but what I did see of him didn't attract me. I'll admit the old *Royal Crown* wasn't a beauty, there was nothing of "the bird with snow-white plumage" about her, but no man should ever speak against his own ship. This Johnston did one day at dinner.

"What a dirty tub this is," he remarked, chewing. "Give me a ship with sails on her and seamen on her. Not a tank full of

lubbers. There was real paint-work on the old *Lochgarry*, and bright work too. Yards and ropes to climb, and a man's work, not a tramp's, to do."

"Well, there's work now," I said. "Your peggy. Clear up."

"Man's work," went on Johnston, ignoring me, "and ship-mates too. A fine crowd and a bunch of workers."

"Well, go back to them, then," I snapped, "but do your peggy first. Come on, Tabnabs."

I rose to go on deck, but on hearing him mutter "some of you fellows make me sick," turned, and, with a straight left, knocked him into his bunk. "Get on with your peggy. I'm senior apprentice here, and this isn't a windjammer."

He spluttered a bit and staggered up, for the old hooker was rolling like fun, and I squared my shoulders for a scrap.

"Look out, Tabnabs," I cried, but the little fellow, seizing a dixie, flung it straight at Johnston, who went down, this time hitting his head on the side of the bunk. He got up, after a few minutes, saying nothing, but took a broom and went to his peggy, glaring at me.

It was over for a time, and I thought Johnston a coward—but I was wrong. After this he kept to himself rather, though, there was a look in his eye I didn't like. I only saw him at meals, or in the dog-watches, when he would sing chanties to us. Heavens! how he could sing. Real deep-sea chanties such as we steamboat-men never learn. I couldn't help admiring him then, for he was a fine figure of a lad, if only he had less swank and a better nature.

But it wasn't long before I again suspected something wrong. We were in the Indian Ocean now, and Tabnabs, who had actually begun to enjoy himself, had lately shown rather a hang-dog look, and seemed to avoid me. I wondered much what it could be, though it was no business of mine if something was wrong with the little ass; there usually was. I found out when he came to relieve me at the wheel one misty day. It was a flat calm, and she was steering like a duck, and he came so quietly that I never noticed him till he appeared at my elbow like a ghost. He said nothing, but quietly took my place.

"West, sou'-west, by a half west," said I, turning to go.

A Narrow Squeak

"West, sou'-west, by——" he mumbled. So I turned to look at him and repeated the course louder. He mumbled it back, keeping his eyes fixed on the binnacle, and I saw that his shirt was torn at the arm, on which was a livid bruise and the marks of strong fingers. I would have stopped to speak only at that moment the Old Man came on the bridge, and I went below at once. But I knew now what was up. Bullying on Johnston's part. So I went aft determined on a row, and as I crossed the after-well, the fog came down thick and clinging, and blotting out everything. Climbing the poop I went aft, and there I met Johnston, hidden behind the tiller-house, smoking a cigarette.

"Here, you," I cried. "What have you been doing to Tabnabs?"

"What's that to you, you steam-boat wallah?"

"Everything. I'm senior here, and I've had enough of you."

"All right then, come on," said he, rising and flinging his cigarette overboard. I came on and landed him one between the eyes that staggered him, and, dodging his right, closed. I'm no weakling, but his grip was terrific, and kicking myself free, I sprang to the rail and charged him again. We sparred a bit on the narrow deck, but, with a stunning blow, he knocked me against the rail, and, as I tried to rise, closed afresh. His hands went round my arms, pinning me against the rail, and I heard him mutter, "I'll teach you steamboat men." Frantically struggling I kicked out my feet and tried to dig my knees in his ribs, but his grip was too strong. Still struggling I edged higher on the rail to try and spring, but I was held by those merciless arms, and, as his grinning face came closer, I was forced farther and farther over. Suddenly I shot backwards, and with a blinding flash everything went blank. From far off I heard a splash, as my nose and ears filled with water, and the last thing I heard in the roaring was another splash, before everything became black.

I came to, lying in the water. Something was holding up my head, and splashing, and a voice said, "Keep up, lad." I struggled and tried to swim, and the effort cleared my brain. "Where am I?" I muttered, as I turned over and saw Johnson's head bobbing beside me.

"In the drink," he spluttered, "so am I. And the ship's gone."

It was true. Nothing but a blank wall of fog surrounded us as we swam the still, deep waters. At this I must have fainted again, for my next recollection is of again being supported and hearing Johnson gasping, "Hit your head—came in after you—no one heard—sorry, old man."

"That's all right," I murmured. We swam and floated for what seemed hours, lost, drifting in the fog. We didn't talk, our breath was too precious. Presently my limbs began to ache, my legs to feel like lead, and my head to spin round. Completely deserted, waiting death, we floated, gasping, not knowing even if we had been missed.

Suddenly the fog lifted, and there, about a mile off, lay the *Royal Crown*, and a boat coming towards us. Johnson shouted and waved his arms, and I uttered a feeble cry, but instantly went under till his strong hand lifted me up again.

"We're saved," he gasped. "Saved, thank God— Splash! Splash for your life, man!" and he began to beat and kick the water like a madman. I moved my legs as fast as I could, but would have been powerless had he not held me up in his mighty grip. Splashing and gasping, and he supporting me, the boat came slowly nearer, while circling beneath us, long and sinister, I glimpsed two evil forms. Nearer came the boat and nearer, till just as the oars were grinding over my head, I went down into darkness again.

I woke in my bunk to find Johnston standing beside me.

"I'm sorry, old man," he murmured. "I've learnt a lesson."

"So have I," I answered, sitting up. "You went in after me; didn't you, and risked being lost to try and save me."

He answered nothing, but merely stared at the deck.

"Shake," said I, putting out my hand. We shook.

We're great pals now, and both on the *Cragstone*, which even Tom admits is something like a ship.

A QUESTION OF CONSCIENCE

By ERNEST C. LIVETT

Morley thrust his head in at the door of the first study on the Fourth Form corridor and grinned apologetically at its occupants.

"Sorry to interrupt you fellows," he said. "Busy?"

"Not a bit," answered Haywood, removing his feet from the mantelpiece and laying down his book. "Come in, old son."

Morley came in. Under his arm he had two bulky packages, which he placed on the table, and threw himself into a chair.

"I looked in to find out if you fellows had fixed anything up for Thursday week," he remarked. "It's Founder's Day, you know, and I thought perhaps, if you hadn't anything particular to do, you might care to come down to my place. It's not so very far from the coll., and the gov'nor'll send the car along for us, I expect. What about it?"

"I'm on, like a shot," said Haywood. "How about you, Benny?"

"Same here," Benson said. "It's jolly decent of you, Morley, old man. As a matter of fact, I was wondering what the dickens we were going to do with our miserable selves."

"Well, that's settled then," said Morley. He frowned suddenly. "Look here, you fellows, I'm in a bit of a hole; it's Caxton, you know."

Morley paused, and scratched the back of his head thoughtfully. Haywood and Benson exchanged glances, but said nothing.

"You two don't get on particularly well with him," went on Morley, after a while. "But—but he's not really such a bad sort; not when you get to know him better, I mean. Well, the fact is, I feel somehow that I ought to ask him to join us on Founder's Day; he's been very decent to me lately, you know. Mind you, I'm not saying I'm in love with the chap. I'm not. But—well, the point is, would you fellows mind if I did invite him home?"

Benson shuffled his feet awkwardly, and stared reflectively at

Haywood. The latter, in his turn, stared steadily at the ceiling.

"You do just what you think right, old son," he said presently. "It's for you to decide."

"Of course," murmured Benson dutifully.

Morley looked at them uncertainly. "Blessed if I know quite what to do," he said, as if to himself. He rose. "Well, anyway, there's another week yet before I need ask him; I'll have to think it over. Oh, by the way, I've just had a hamper from my Aunt Mary. As usual, she's shoved in two whacking great cakes—I don't eat 'em, you know. Can't stand currant cakes at any price. But I don't like to tell the old lady so; she makes 'em herself, so I can't very well ask her to stop sending 'em. She'd get huffy at once. I thought perhaps you fellows would care for one."

"Ye gods!" muttered Benson, under his breath. Haywood glared at him warningly.

"Thanks very much, old son," he said. "Is that it?"

He indicated the two packages which Morley had placed on the table.

Morley nodded. "Yes. There are two there. I thought I'd—er—give the other one to—to Caxton."

"Oh!"

"I'll buzz along and give it to him now," said Morley, picking up one of the packages. "Well, so long, you fellows."

"I say, Morley," exclaimed Haywood, colouring slightly. "Just because we—we don't get on very well with Caxton, don't let that interfere with your arrangements."

"Righto!" said Morley, rather shortly. He went out, closing the door behind him. Haywood looked at Benson thoughtfully.

"Rather awkward, eh?"

Benson nodded gloomily. "Beastly. Poor old Morley! He's a thundering good sort, but he's easily taken in. He's too soft-hearted—that's the trouble with him."

"If he does happen to ask Caxton down to his place, it'll muck up our holiday for us," observed Haywood. "You know what Caxton is; he's been trying to wangle an invitation to Morley House for the last three weeks. It licks me why old Morley can't see through him."

A Question of Conscience

"He only wants to go because Morley's pater is an earl," growled Benson scornfully. "Rotten snob! Afterwards, he'll strut about and brag of how Lord Rockingham shook hands with him, and made a fuss of him generally. Pahl!"

"Well, Ashby's going home on Founder's Day, too. Why doesn't Caxton pal up with him?" grumbled Haywood.

"Ashby's pater's only a baronet," grunted Benson. "Not good enough for him!"

"Suppose not," said Haywood savagely. "Well, it can't be helped. We can't very well butt in and tell Morley that we don't want Caxton."

"Not exactly!" Benson agreed.

Haywood stared hard at the table for a few seconds, evidently pondering upon the subject. There had never been much love lost between Caxton and himself. The former was of a type that Haywood heartily disliked—a bully and a sneak at heart, but who could, with astonishing ease, render himself exceedingly pleasant when such a transformation was likely to prove beneficial to himself. Haywood had been much perplexed by Caxton's recent efforts to ingratiate himself with Morley; he had known, of course, that there must have been some reason underlying Caxton's servility, but it was not until now that he realized what that reason was, and it filled him with disgust. Still, as he himself had observed, it couldn't be helped; he would have to grin and bear it. Haywood grinned now as his eye fell suddenly upon the cake that Morley had left on the table.

"I say, Benny, what the dickens are we going to do with that?"

"That cake? Goodness only knows! We can't eat it, that's certain," chuckled Benson.

They stared thoughtfully at the package containing the cake. It was a custom of Morley's Aunt Mary to send him tuck hampers with unfailing regularity. As far as that went, all was well. Unfortunately, it went further. Morley had never yet received a hamper that did not contain, among other delicacies, either one or more specimens of Aunt Mary's culinary talent, and more often than not these took the form of currant cakes. It was Morley's habit to distribute these cakes, as they arrived, among his fellow

Fourth Formers, but as time went on even the hardiest of the juniors fought shy of them. Just what was wrong with the cakes it was impossible to say; Haywood had been known to remark, out of Morley's hearing, that they were composed chiefly of concrete, and the Fourth, as a whole, were inclined to agree with him.

Thus it was that one of Aunt Mary's cakes came to be a thing known and dreaded among the juniors, although they would no more have thought of explaining this to Morley than they would have thought of insulting the Head to his face.

"Can't we give it to somebody?" suggested Haywood hopefully.

"No fear!" grinned Benson. "Not unless we want to be sent to Coventry!"

Haywood chuckled: "What about shoving it up at the top of that cupboard?"

Benson shook his head. "He comes in here pretty often—he might see it and wonder why we were keeping it."

"By Jove, yes!"

They stared at each other in silence. Haywood suddenly slapped his knee.

"I've got it!" he exclaimed joyfully. "We'll give it to old Tanner. He looks as if he's got a digestion like an elephant! I daresay he'd be jolly pleased to have it."

"Not a bad idea," assented Benson, chuckling.

"I'll trot along with it now," said Haywood, tucking the cake under his arm and making for the door. "Shan't be long."

Old Tanner, the school porter, was in his lodge when Haywood tapped at his door. He stared rather guiltily at the junior, and passed the back of his hand across his mouth.

"Jest takin' a little nip to keep me—me sperrits up like, Master 'Aywood," he vouchsafed. "What may you be wanting, sir?"

"I don't want anything," replied Haywood. "What have you got there, Tanner?" he added, glancing at the half-filled glass on the table.

Tanner coughed. "Whisky, sir. But——"

"Then I'm just in time," said Haywood solemnly. He held out his parcel. "I've got a cake for you, Tanner, old sport.

A Question of Conscience

Care for it? It—it goes down well with whisky, I'm told."

"A cake? For me, sir?" said the porter in surprise.

"Yes. I'm not keen on cakes myself; at least, not that sort of cake," explained Haywood. "So I thought perhaps you——"

"Well, it's very 'andsome of you, sir," murmured Tanner.

"Not at all," returned the junior airily. "Welcome. So long."

Tanner thanked him again, with tears in his eyes, although Haywood suspected that this display of emotion was due rather to "the little nip" than to any feelings of gratitude. Anyway, he had got rid of that beastly cake, and that was all he cared about. He returned to his study gleefully, and Benson glanced up at him expectantly.

"Any luck?" he inquired.

Haywood winked.

"Good man!" said Benson.

On the following evening, as Benson was settling down to prep, Haywood entered the study like a whirlwind, slammed the door, and flung himself into the one armchair the room boasted.

"Chuck that rot, Benny!" he said briefly. "You haven't heard, of course?"

"Heard what?" asked Benson curiously.

"Morley's tumbled to that cake business!"

Benson gasped. "How on earth——"

"I've just been speaking to him," went on Haywood, his eyes sparkling. "It seems he went down to old Tanner's lodge about half an hour ago—wanted to tip him for bringing up his hamper yesterday, so he said. And the first thing he set eyes on was that beastly cake. It was on the table; evidently Tanner was just going to have some of it for his tea——"

Haywood broke off and chuckled.

"Dashed if I see anything funny in it," growled Benson. "What on earth did he say to you?"

"Nothing!"

"But surely——" began Benson.

"He thinks Caxton gave it to Tanner," gasped Haywood ecstatically.



"Well, it's very 'andsome of you, sir."

Benson whistled. "Great Scott! Didn't you tell him that you——"

"Not likely!"

"You didn't? Hang it all, Haywood, it's not playing the game!"

"I don't see why," asserted Haywood coolly. "In fact, I don't see what it's got to do with me at all!"

Benson stared at him. "You know what'll happen, of course? Morley won't have anything more to do with Caxton, and——"

"Exactly," grinned Haywood. "And Caxton won't get his invitation to Morley House. That's the best of it, old son!"

"Well, I don't like it," persisted Benson doggedly. "We ought to tell Morley the truth."

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"Look here," said Haywood blandly. "Morley gives me a cake; he also gives Caxton a cake. I give mine to Tanner. Morley sees the cake in Tanner's lodge. Thinks it's Caxton's. Well, what have I got to do with that? I didn't say it was Caxton's, did I? No. So you see——"

In spite of himself, Benson chuckled. "Did Morley say he wasn't going to ask Caxton down to his place?" he asked.

"Rather! He's just told me he's finished with the beggar. Morley is a queer chap like that—proud as Punch."

"Supposing he mentions it to Caxton?" suggested Benson.

Haywood shook his head. "He won't do that. In fact, he practically told me he wouldn't. He said there wasn't any need for explanation, and that Caxton would know well enough what was wrong, and would probably keep out of his way for a bit."

"Well, if you ask me, I think it's rather a low down trick," Benson said. "After all, it's nothing to do with us if Caxton has been playing up to Morley for an invitation——"

"That's just the point," interrupted Haywood. "As you say, old son, it's not our affair, so why worry?"

Benson was silent.

"If Morley likes to make a mistake—well, we can't help it," continued Haywood cheerfully. "Come on, Benny, let's go down to the common room. You ought to think yourself jolly lucky that Caxton's not coming with us on Founder's Day."

In the common room they found a crowd of juniors engaged in various occupations; over in one corner Caxton was chatting amiably with Ashby. Morley glanced up as Haywood and Benson came in.

"Hallo, you fellows," he said. "What's wrong, Benny? You look as if you'd just come from a funeral. I suppose Haywood's told you that I've finished with Caxton? So he won't join us on Founder's Day. By Jove, Haywood! I fancy you're right about that chap, after all."

"Of course I'm right," said Haywood easily. "Look at him now, Morley. He's trying the same game on with Ashby that he tried with you."

Morley nodded contemptuously.

"I say——" began Benson.

"Shut up, you idiot!" Haywood hissed in his ear.

During the week that followed, however, he struggled hard with his conscience, and it is fairly safe to assume that, if it had not been for Haywood's restraining hand, he would have told Morley the truth of the matter. Benson was in an awkward position. He wanted to tell the truth to Morley and thus clear Caxton in Morley's eyes; on the other hand loyalty to Haywood kept him silent. All the same, he reproached himself severely, and it was not until the evening before Founder's Day that he arrived at a decision.

"Look here, Haywood," he said abruptly. "I don't think I'll come with you to-morrow, after all, if you don't mind."

Haywood stared at him in astonishment. "Not coming? Why?"

Benson shrugged his shoulders. "I'd rather not," was all he said, gruffly.

"Is it on account of Caxton?" demanded Haywood, frowning.

"Well, yes."

"I think you're an ass," said Haywood deliberately. "Of course, you're coming to-morrow."

"I'm not. I've made up my mind."

The atmosphere was becoming a trifle strained. Benson found it difficult to explain to his chum that by foregoing the pleasure of the morrow he would thereby ease his conscience as regarded Caxton. He argued mentally that if Caxton were to be denied an invitation to Morley House on account of a simple mistake which, but for Haywood, he could easily have rectified, it was only just that he, Benson, should refuse a similar invitation. Haywood had never liked Caxton, but Benson considered that in the present instance he was carrying matters a little too far.

Haywood did his utmost to make light of the affair. But that, as Benson coldly pointed out, could not alter the fact that Caxton was bearing the blame for what Haywood had done himself.

"H'm," muttered Haywood, thoughtfully, "perhaps it is a bit thick, when you come to think of it."

"It's not playing the game," persisted Benson. "You must admit that, Haywood."

Haywood nodded. "Yes, you're right, old son. But look here,

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it's going to be beastly difficult explaining it to Morley. You know what Morley is; he'll drop us like hot bricks."

Benson nodded, and ran a hand through his hair in perplexity.

"Look here," he said, after a while, "is there any need for us to explain? What I mean is this: we know perfectly well that Caxton doesn't deserve to be invited to Morley's place, because he doesn't care a fig for Morley himself. Well, that's all right. He's not going to be invited. We won't go home with Morley either. I fancy that will square things, eh?"

Haywood snapped his teeth together savagely. "How are we going to get out of it?" he said hopelessly. "Morley will know perfectly well that we're making rotten excuses when we tell him that we're not coming."

"Dashed awkward," agreed Benson, thoughtfully. "As far as I can see, one of us will have to develop a cold and get shoved into the sanny. It wouldn't do for two of us to play that game; it would look too beastly suspicious. The other one'll have to sit by the bed and keep him company."

"Ye gods!" groaned Haywood. "What a holiday! Blow Aunt Mary and her blessed cakes!"

"It's the only thing to be done," said Benson firmly.

That same night he had apparently caught a heavy chill, and was forthwith removed to the sanatorium. In the morning when Morley came to see how the patient was getting on, he found Haywood seated by Benson's bed.

"Sorry to mess up your arrangements like this, old son," said Benson, vainly endeavouring to assume a hoarse tone of voice.

"It can't be helped, Benny," said Morley, sympathetically. "It's rotten hard luck for all three of us; at least—I suppose you won't come without Benson?" he added, turning to Haywood.

Haywood shook his head gloomily. "I don't think so, Morley; thanks all the same," he said.

And Morley departed.

"Well, this takes the biscuit!" exclaimed Haywood, disgustedly. "We've got to stick in this blessed place all day, Benny."

"Absolutely," agreed Benson. "But, anyway, it eases my conscience——"

“ Oh, blow your silly conscience!”

The day dragged wearily for the two juniors. Haywood stayed loyally by his chum's side for the greater part of the time, despite the matron's protests, but neither felt much inclined for conversation, and the shouts of the fellows on the playing-fields rendered them more irritable than ever.

“ Well, this is about the first time that I've ever felt like a blessed martyr,” growled Haywood, when darkness had set in. “ Isn't it about time you started to recover, Benny?”

Benson thought it was. By bedtime, he voiced his opinion that it would be safe for him to get up on the morrow, and, wonderingly, the matron agreed.

On the following morning, as he was on his way down to breakfast, Benson came face to face with Caxton on the stairs.

“ Hallo, Benson,” he said. “ Feel better?”

“ Yes, thanks,” returned Benson shortly.

“ Glad to hear it,” said Caxton affably. “ Rotten luck, being seedy on Founder's Day. You were going home with Morley, too, weren't you? I had a topping time; went down to young Ashby's place, you know. His pater's a baronet, and——”

“ I know,” interrupted Benson. A sudden idea occurred to him. “ I say, Caxton, Morley gave you a cake the other day, didn't he?”

“ Ye gods, yes!” chuckled Caxton. “ Why?”

“ Oh, nothing. What did you do with it?” Benson asked curiously.

Caxton grinned, glanced round over his shoulder, and lowered his voice.

“ Don't say a word,” he whispered. “ I gave it to old Tanner.”

“ You did what?” roared Benson.

“ Don't make such a row! I gave it to Tanner. He was quite pleased with it, although he told me that Haywood had given him one, too, on the previous day! Said he'd enjoyed it immensely, but—— Here, I say! Great Scott! What the dickens are you doing?”

Which last question was really superfluous, for, without one word of explanation, Benson was kicking him down the stairs!

THE JAWS OF DOOM

By C. BERNARD RUTLEY

Professor Ingelow, the famous archæologist, and his nephew, Jack Hunter, were sitting in the tiny cabin of the latter's sloop, *Skylark*, poring over an ancient piece of parchment upon which appeared the rough tracings of a map. They were cruising in the Pacific, and their object was a small, almost unknown island in Micronesia, on which, according to the map, there were the ruins of an ancient temple.

"We should be there by dawn to-morrow," said Jack.

"Good!" cried the Professor, rubbing his hands. "My boy, if I mistake not, we are about to make the archæological find of the century. The presence of Guardians," and he pointed to the map where a series of dots—bearing that name—surrounded the site of the temple, "reminds me strongly——"

At that moment the third member of the party, Dick Hunter, Jack's young brother, a boy of eighteen, hailed them from the deck. "There's an open boat on the starboard quarter," he cried, "and she seems to be full of dead or 'dying men! You'd better come up, Jack. There's one man waving to us."

Jack and his uncle were on deck in an instant. "Run down on them, Dick," said Jack, after a survey of the boat through his binoculars. "They certainly seem in a bad way, though——" he paused thoughtfully. "This means putting back, Uncle."

"Can't be helped, my boy, but not a word about our search!"

By this time the sloop was nearing the boat, which appeared to contain about a dozen men in the last stages of exhaustion.

"Boat ahoy!" shouted Jack, and one of the men raised himself wearily to catch the rope which Dick Hunter flung to him. The next moment the boat was alongside the sloop, and looking down Jack was astonished at the appearance of its occupants, whose general robustness belied their seemingly exhausted condition.

Then, in a flash, the truth burst upon him. "Cast off!" he yelled; but he was too late, for the boat's crew had suddenly sprung to violent life, and were already swarming aboard the sloop.

"Hands up, my hearties!" cried a jovial voice, and the next moment a huge, bearded man, with only one arm, and with his left eye covered with a black patch, clambered on board.

"Singapore Jack!" exclaimed Jack Hunter in astonishment, tinged with no little dismay. "What is the meaning of this, man?"

"Meaning, laddie, meaning?" cried the giant, clapping Jack on the shoulder. "Why, just this. Hearing you were on to something good, Singapore thought he would come along and keep you company. Now, comrades," he continued, "just hold these cock-birds whilst I run over their pockets, and find that there map I told you about. Why, here it is! Bless me, but that's lucky! Now, mates, truss 'em up, and shove 'em down in the hold; and don't go forgetting this, young 'uns, and you old 'un, that if you don't want to feed the sharks you just behave yourselves!"

"Better chuck 'em overboard at once, Singapore," suggested one of the other ruffians.

Swinging round, the giant turned on the speaker in a sudden blaze of fury. "Dash me! Who's commander here?" he flared.

"No offence, Sing, no offence!" returned the other, cringing away from his leader, whilst the rest of the gang hurriedly deposited their captives in the hold and then clapped on the hatch.

"What's the meaning of this, Jack?" asked Professor Ingelow, when their captors had gone.

"It means," replied Jack bitterly, "that we've fallen into the clutches of the most heartless ruffian on the Pacific seaboard. I imagine he thinks we are after treasure. Well, my advice is, let him think so. If he knew we were only after a few old stones he'd probably chuck us overboard at once, just to ease his feelings, whilst if we can keep him in a good temper and get the gang treasure hunting on the island, we may be able to escape."

It was early the next morning that the prisoners were awakened from uneasy slumber by the trampling of feet on deck, and the voice of Singapore Jack shouting orders. Then came the rush of the anchor chains, followed by the creaking of blocks as the sails were lowered. Shortly afterwards their breakfast was brought, and when they had finished their feet were unbound, and they were commanded to go on deck.

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On deck they found their captors lowering the longboat into the water, preparatory to landing upon an island covered with dense, tropical vegetation, which lay, like a jewel on the water, a quarter of a mile from the *Skylark*. To seaward was a coral reef on which the Pacific rollers broke with a never-ending thunder.

The pirates were in great good humour. Hatchets, picks, spades, and a number of sacks were bundled into the boat, and the whole gang embarked, taking with them their prisoners.

"Well, laddie," said Singapore, leering at Jack Hunter, as he steered towards the island. "What do you know about this treasure me and my mates are after?"

"No more than you do," answered Jack shortly.

"No, I don't expect you do," said the villain musingly. "Which, all said and done, is lucky for you, my buck, or I might have to use a little persuasion, eh?"

When they reached the shore the boat was run high up on the glittering yellow sand, and whilst some of the pirates unloaded the tools, others marched the prisoners up the beach, and binding them securely, flung them down in the shade of a big rock. Then, with the exception of one who was left to guard the boat, the remainder shouldered the spades and picks, and, with loud halloos, plunged into the forest, led by Singapore Jack.

Slowly the morning wore away. Gradually it got hotter and hotter, when suddenly Jack Hunter sat up, shaking his arms free from the ropes which had bound them, and which he had severed by patient rubbing on a sharp piece of coral. Soon his legs were free, and then he set about releasing his companions.

"What now?" said the Professor, when they had rubbed some feeling into their numbed limbs.

"Back to the *Skylark*," replied Jack, who had been peeping round the rock. "The man they left on watch is asleep, and with the sloop in our possession we've got the drop on Singapore."

As nothing was to be gained by waiting, they stole quietly towards the boat, and before the pirate knew what had happened he was bound, and gagged, and the boat was being rowed swiftly towards the sloop.

Once on board, the Professor and Dick carried their captive



Prisoners!

to the hold, whilst Jack went straight to the cabin where half a dozen rifles were usually kept in a rack. To his joy he found them untouched, and he immediately served them out to his little crew, together with a plentiful supply of ammunition, for they had unanimously agreed to see the adventure through.

Then followed a time of weary waiting. The afternoon wore away, and night fell; yet there was no sign of the returning pirates. An anxious night yielded the same result; and when all the next day and the following night passed without any one of the pirate gang putting in an appearance, Jack called a council of war.

"They're lying doggo," said Dick. "Waiting till we go ashore, and then they'll jump on us."

"I don't agree with you," said the Professor. "One can't

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tell, of course, but queer things happen sometimes when these ancient faiths are meddled with. Personally, I suspect some mishap."

"Same here!" said Jack. "So I propose we follow their tracks, and find out what has happened to them."

Two hours later the three men, fully armed, emerged cautiously from the forest on to a comparatively clear space, some thirty yards wide, which ran like a broad high road through the thick vegetation. The space was completely paved with huge blocks of dressed stone, and as he contemplated this work of some bygone civilization the Professor stroked his beard thoughtfully.

"Curious!" he mused. "This is evidently the outskirts of the temple. Why, then, did the builders leave that blank space to be choked with forest?" and he pointed to where, on the other side of the causeway, a dense, sharply defined wall of vivid green vegetation cut off all further view.

"Best go and see!" said Jack tersely, whilst Dick gave an involuntary shiver. "The place gives me the creeps!" he muttered.

As they neared the green mass of vegetation they discovered that it was composed of a thick, snake-like creeper, and they were just about to seek a way through, when a cry from Dick made Jack and the Professor bring their rifles to the ready with a jerk. For not twenty yards away Singapore Jack was leaning against the stem of a stunted tree, leering at them out of his one eye.

"Hands up, Singapore!" snapped Jack Hunter, covering the man with his rifle. "Hands up!" he repeated, as the pirate took no notice of his command, and then something still and rigid about the figure caused him to approach nearer, and touch it.

"Dead!" he cried, and then a horrified exclamation from the Professor brought his eyes to the green thicket a few yards away. There, as though in strenuous action, were the eleven other pirates! Some grasped the creeper as though dragging the tendrils apart; others seemed to be hacking at the stalks with their hatchets; but one and all were in the stillness and rigidity of death.

"But what——?" cried Jack in horrified accents, stepping forward to examine one of the dead men. The next moment the Professor had dragged him violently backwards, whilst a lithe, green shape, the same colour as the vegetation, and no thicker

than a man's thumb, shot out towards him with a venomous hiss.

"Back for your lives!" yelled the Professor, and as the three explorers turned to flee they saw that the thicket was literally alive with green snakes. *It was a living wall of death!*

"The Guardians! Heaven help us, the Guardians!" exclaimed the Professor, wiping the cold sweat of fear from his forehead.

"Well, what's to be done now?" said Jack, when they had recovered somewhat from the shock of the discovery. "We know what has happened to Singapore and Company, and there is certainly no getting into the temple that way!"

"No, but there *is* some way in!" said the Professor. "The very existence of that death-trap proves it! Let us follow the causeway, and see where it leads us."

The causeway ran in a huge circle, and they had not gone far before they discovered that a section of about six feet wide sloped downhill, and following it they soon found themselves at the mouth of a narrow tunnel.

It was undoubtedly the entrance to the temple. Switching on his electric torch, the Professor led the way along an underground passage for some three hundred yards, at the end of which they suddenly emerged again into the open air.

They were in a huge courtyard paved with immense blocks of stone. Surrounding the enclosure was a low wall upon which, at regular intervals, stood hideous, stone effigies of gods and goddesses, whilst some fifty yards away was the circle of rank vegetation which sheltered the Guardians of the temple.

But what chiefly attracted the attention of the explorers was a colossal mass of stone occupying one end of the enclosure, and rudely cut to represent the upper half of a man's head. The forehead, eyes, nose, and upper jaw, with a row of cruel fangs, were all carved in gigantic dimensions, but the lower jaw was represented by the floor of the enclosure. Thus, on approaching closer to examine the strange idol, the explorers were able to walk into the open mouth of the colossus as into a cave.

"Wonderful! Wonderful!" exclaimed the Professor, stepping farther into the cavity. As he did so the great block of stone upon which they were all standing, and which formed the lower jaw

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of the idol, suddenly tilted up, and, without the slightest warning, the three companions were shot down into utter darkness.

"Interesting! An exceedingly clever device!" were the first words Jack Hunter heard when he had been able to collect his dazed and scattered senses.

"Interesting, indeed!" he ejaculated. "I wish to the dickens I knew where we were!"

"We are in the sacrificial pits, if I mistake not," replied the Professor complacently. "Don't you realize, my boy, the ingenious contrivance by which the captive, on walking into the mouth of the god, was suddenly made to disappear as though swallowed up. Strike a match, Jack. I have dropped my torch, and I am rather anxious about Dick."

With a mumbled reply Jack struck a match, and the Professor found his torch, which had luckily escaped damage. Switching on the light they discovered Dick sitting up, ruefully rubbing his head, and having assured themselves that no bones were broken they turned the light on their surroundings.

They were at the bottom of a circular, stone basin from which the stone shoot, down which they had been precipitated, sloped up into the obscurity above.

"The sacrificial pool," commented the Professor. "Probably it was inhabited, at one time, by some fearful monster. Ah, I thought so!" as directing the rays of the torch to one side of the basin they fell on a huge, white skeleton.

"An alligator by the look of it," remarked the Professor, "though how it got here is an interesting problem."

At that moment Dick, who had also been exploring by the light of a few matches, cried out excitedly, telling them to bring the torch. Returning to the base of the shoot they found him bending over a small, hide sack, which, even as he lifted it, crumbled with age, letting loose a cascade of red, blue, green, and white stones.

"Jewels, or I'm a Dutchman!" shouted Dick, whilst the Professor, equally excited, went down on his knees, and began to examine the stones, many of which bore deeply cut inscriptions.

"The temple treasure!" he said. "Thrown here for safety at some time of crisis, and never reclaimed. These inscriptions——"

"Steady, you two!" admonished Jack. "Shove those things into your pockets. We are imprisoned in this black hole, and the only entrance or exit we know of is closed by a stone weighing a couple of tons! Let's have the torch, Uncle."

First of all Jack examined the stone basin, but beyond the skeleton of the huge saurian they discovered nothing except a flight of worn steps up which they climbed to the stone floor of the vault. But there bitter disappointment awaited them. Every inch of the floor and walls they examined, but everywhere their eyes were met by great blocks of stone, so smooth, and fitting so exactly that it was difficult to tell where one stone joined another. At last they were faced with the desperate conclusion that the only way out was the way they had come in. At last the torch gave out, and half dead with fatigue and despair they fell into an uneasy slumber.

How long they slept they never knew, but it was Dick who awakened first, and then woke Jack and the Professor to listen to the low, rumbling sound which had aroused him. Even as they listened the noise increased, coming apparently from somewhere beneath them, and then, with an appalling suddenness, the stone floor on which they were lying began to heave like a rough sea.

"To the wall!" yelled the Professor. Hardly had they sprung back, and flattened themselves against the side of the vault, when there came a second shock, and the roof which supported the idol over the farther end of the pit collapsed.

Jack was the first to realize that the way to escape lay open. As the dust settled somewhat he became aware of a dull, leaden daylight shining through a great hole in the roof, and springing forward he called to the others to follow him. With desperate haste they clambered over the pile of debris, and up the stone shoot, now littered with broken bits of rock and rubbish. Even as they emerged into the courtyard of the temple, and flung themselves flat on a great block of stone, there came a third shock which completed the destruction of the vault, and sent the remainder of the roof crashing down on the very spot where they had been standing but a few moments before.

For a long time the three companions lay where they had

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flung themselves, hardly daring to move. Then, as no further shocks occurred, they rose to their feet, and looked about them. An amazing sight met their eyes. The floor of the courtyard resembled a ploughed field, so cracked and crumpled was it, whilst the great blocks of stone had been flung up, and piled one on top of another like a gigantic game of bricks. The enclosing wall with its line of hideous images had been razed to the ground; but most astonishing of all was a great gap in the mass of vegetation which had surrounded the temple. For fully a hundred yards the green wall of death had disappeared, literally swallowed up by the earth.

Like drunken men the survivors of the catastrophe, to which by an irony of fate they owed their lives, stumbled from the accursed place. Urged on by a desperate anxiety they ploughed their way through the tropical forest, until, at last, at the end of three hours, their clothes torn to rags, and haggard with fatigue, they emerged on the beach.

"Thank heaven!" said Jack Hunter, with a sigh of heartfelt thankfulness, for there, upon the calm waters of the lagoon, looking as trim as though there had been no such thing as an earthquake within a thousand miles, floated the *Skylark* safe and sound.

With many hours of daylight before them—they must have been some twenty hours in the vault—the three survivors put to sea without delay, and by evening the island, with its temple, and its broken ring of deadly guardians, was but a blur on the horizon.

"May I never set eyes on that place again!" said Jack.

"A pity though," murmured the Professor. "A most interesting relic of the past!"

"It was worth it!" supplemented Dick, feeling his pockets, which bulged with the jewels he had clung to through all the vicissitudes of their adventure; and so thought the others when they heard the value a great jeweller set upon their find.

"Singapore was right after all," said Jack. "There ~~was~~ treasure, and it was the greatest stroke of luck, as far as we were concerned, our falling into the hands of the pirates. Had we been left to ourselves the Guardians would have had us to a certainty!"

A HASTY PREJUDICE

By STANLEY W. GRIST *

From the first, Hutchings did not take on at Netley College, the reasons being fairly obvious. You see, when you're used to seeing new boys turn up at school practically all of the same species, young, green, timid, &c., it naturally goes against your grain to welcome a hefty lump of a boy about sixteen years of age. Now, however old the newcomer may be, he can soon enter the highest circles of the school if he be particularly adept at any branch of sport. Should he turn out a rattling full back or a first-rate bat, much would be forgiven him.

Hutchings, however, from the start appeared to possess one hobby—and one only—that of messing round with measly grubs—Natural History is the official name, I believe. A quiet, reserved sort of chap, he would spend all his spare time wandering off on his own, chasing pretty little butterflies or scratching round for some bally old fossils, when every decent fellow in the school was either playing or watching the House cricket matches.

When old Hutch first lobbed up at the school he seemed keen on the fellowship of our chaps; but when they continually laughed him to scorn for his eccentricities, he gradually drifted apart and seemed content to bury himself in his rotten old hobby. He never spoke about himself or made any explanation as to why he was such a rank outsider. Though they say he did seem to be on the point of making some explanation to old Sheppard, his dormitory *vis-à-vis*, but evidently thought better of it. There is no one more reserved than an English schoolboy—and certainly none more stubborn when once he gets his back up.

This extraordinary new boy quickly achieved a nickname—Grubby—which stuck to him for many years—even after he had left school. Now, what annoyed us chaps so much was that Grubby was such a clinking build of a chap, and it seemed to us such a

A Hasty Prejudice

waste of jolly useful material. Some of the chaps were anxious to bring the studious one out of his shell, and all sorts of schemes were devised.

"I'll tell you what," said Mason. "Let's rag his study this afternoon when he's out digging up his measly grubs!"

"What a lark to see his face when he lobs back and sees his dear little wrigglers all over the bally place; what a mess we could make!" exclaimed Dean, my chum.

"All those in favour of making the worm turn, kindly show in the usual way," called out young Henderson. "Carried unanimously!" as seven pairs of hands shot up.

In great glee we made full arrangements for the upheaval and kept the secret to ourselves. The rest of the morning dragged along, and it seemed ages to the time when we saw Grubby with his varied paraphernalia well off on his Wednesday ramble.

Quietly creeping up to his study we were agreeably surprised to find the door unlocked. Evidently he was a trusting old bird—and jolly decent of him too: saved us all the fag of juggling about with locks or doing the Blondin act on window ledges. What a great study for a really bang-up-to-date rag it was! Everywhere were boxes, jars, bottles, glass cases, &c., all containing some filthy reptiles, some alive and others dead. Did we do the thing thoroughly, think you? Excuse my mirth, a minute. It's a wonder we didn't bring the whole school round our ears judging by the racket we kicked up between us.

"Look out where you're pouring those beastly taddies," shouted Stongo Watt, as Mason inverted a huge jar over the speaker's feet.

"Well, I've got to pour them somewhere and it seems almost impossible to avoid those canoes of yours in such a small space," returned the tadpole destroyer.

"My hat, what an infernal mess!" exclaimed Mason. "Look at that old frog hopping over those butterflies!"

There's no doubt it was a mess all right. Now that the deed was done, I began to feel a bit rotten about it. Grubby certainly had kept to himself but he had never interfered with other fellows' affairs; and now as I surveyed the conglomeration on the floor—

the work of many months destroyed—I felt rather sick about the whole matter.

“All we’ve got to do now is to watch for his coming back and then hang round and see how he takes it,” gurgled Fatty Henderson, who evidently was not experiencing similar feelings to my own.

Duly at 5.30 p.m. our victim returned. Entering his study without a word to anyone, he quickly closed the door behind him. Stealthily creeping up one by one we first peeped through the keyhole, but all we glimpsed was a tiny point of light.

“Let’s open the door quietly,” whispered Watt, our leader, “and see if the old fool’s got any sporting instincts at all.”

Following the speaker’s advice we opened the door bit by bit, and, hearing nothing, boldly pushed the door wide open. I think we all felt pretty rotten at the sight that met our eyes, for there was Grubby leaning on his arm, and sobbing for all he was worth.

It took Watty to break the silence, as with set face, determined to go through with it, he called:

“Now let’s hope you’ll give up your rotten grub-snatching and come and play the game on the field.”

Poor old Grubby didn’t appear to hear, as he never even raised his head to see who were his antagonists.

Personally I think that most of us would have made it up to our victim in some way or another, but everything else was temporarily put out of our heads by the coming of the great event of the year—our match against Greystones, our biggest rivals in cricket. It’s a funny thing when you come to look at it, but practically every English school worthy of the name has got some particular rival that stands out above all others. Fellows would go without their tucker for a week to beat a school of this type; every boy will get quite passionate as he sums up the failings of such a school. To be beaten at any sport by such a fierce rival makes one feel too miserable to live. Such a rival was Greystones to us. To make matters worse, they had beaten us by three wickets in the match played on our own ground early in the season, and we somehow felt that it was up to us to stop their crowing; it

A Hasty Prejudice

was getting jolly unbearable, I can tell you. I know what I'm talking about, for my half-witted cousin goes to Greystones. He actually had the rotten cheek to send me a book on cricket for my birthday. There's breeding for you!

The team for the match had just been put up on the notice board and there was a surging mob round the notice, anxious to see who was playing. Everybody seemed jolly optimistic—particularly those who weren't playing.

"I'd give all I possess to give those fellows the hiding of their lives," we heard Grove our fast bowler saying to Ferris, the team's slogger.

"Well, we've got our full team out this time so there's no reason why we shouldn't give 'em a thorough trouncing," replied Ferris.

The simmering excitement increased as the fateful Saturday drew near, and at last the morning came. The match was to start at 11 and as we had a drive of about seven miles, our drag left at 11.45 sharp.

It had turned out a great day and all we wanted to complete our happiness was to win the toss. We were all confident and our excitement knew no bounds as we gradually approached the drive of our rival school.

So eager was little "Microbe", one of our best bats, to be at it, that in trying to be the first out of the drag he created great laughter by slithering, toboggan-wise, down the steps of the old bus. To our great amazement he gave a cry of pain, and we could see by his face—gone suddenly white—that he had hurt himself.

"What's up, man?" eagerly called out our captain, Lumsden. "Anything serious?"

"It's my bally wrist. I came down heavily on it and it feels as though it was broken," replied poor old Microbe in great pain.

A hasty examination revealed this to be the truth. Microbe, our second best bat was out of the team and we were playing Greystones! What putrid luck! Unfortunately both our second and third elevens had home matches and consequently we had brought no twelfth man.

"Here's a fine how d'ye do," exclaimed Mr. Short, our sports master, as some of the chaps helped Microbe to the schoolhouse in the distance. "We should have brought a spare man and let the second eleven——"

"Hallo, who's that fellow?" exclaimed Rattray, as he pointed out a chap wearing the school colours, coming towards us through the trees.

To our intense surprise we saw it was no less a person than Grubby—unconsciously stalking a butterfly, with net outstretched.

Our combined "Hey there!" made him look up, and when he saw the eager faces watching him, he flushed with embarrassment, and was just about to make off when old Shorty ducked after him and brought him to light. In a few sentences good old Short explained the situation and said:

"Haven't you ever played, Hutchings? We must have another chap; may be useful just to keep an end up."

Grubby appeared to think deeply for a minute and then said:

"I used to play once, sir, but I had to give it up."

"But you could play just this once, to help the old school out, surely?" cried Lumsden.

"I'll give you a hand, sir, but I don't think the other fellows at school would be keen on my playing."

"Oh rot; you do your best, and who cares what anybody says," half a dozen of us exclaimed.

Poor old Grubby seemed quite overcome as we made our way towards the pavilion. As he donned the flannels of a Greystones kid about his own size, he seemed to change into a different being. He looked the part to a tee, and seemed quite keen now that he had entered into the thing. If he turned out to be a mug, he certainly looked a cricketer, with his fine figure, and remarkable easy action as he walked on to the field.

There is no need for me to describe the match in detail. Lucky Greystones won the toss and proceeded to bat. Three wickets fell quickly and our hopes soared, but a fine stand by Pearson, their captain, and a long chap called Raymont put a different complexion on the game. They absolutely collared our bowling and looked like taking root there, when Rattray brought off a

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snorting catch at the wickets and the lengthy chap was out. That catch meant a lot to us, for no one stayed in long with Pearson, and the side were out for 212. It was a pretty fair score and our chaps would have to shake a leg to win the game.

"Let's hope we put up a good first wicket partnership," I said to Leith our stonewaller, as Jeffries took strike to the Greystones' fast bowler. But what was that? A mighty cry went up from all round the ground as Jeff's wickets were spreadeagled by a beautiful length ball. One wicket down and no runs on the board.

Oh, the ups and downs of that fateful match! What a varied tale that score board had to tell! Manson, after putting up a decent show, touched one of the fast bowler's and was caught low down in the slips. Dougal looked like getting set, when he foolishly ran himself out. Seventy-two for three wickets! Then a fine stand by Mason and Leithy brought the score up to a hundred and forty-seven, when Mason was caught on the boundary by a catch worthy of Hendren. How we cheered him for his fine innings of sixty-eight, an effort which had practically made us safe for a good win.

It is hard to describe what followed. Fellows who usually made a fine show, got out in all sorts of idiotic ways, a perfect rot setting in. I never felt so comfortable in my life when I was in—the ball appearing to be like a football; of course I had to go and shove my leg in front of a straight one. Think of it, nine wickets were down for a hundred and fifty-one! Greystones' supporters were yelling themselves hoarse and making silly asses of themselves, chucking each other's caps all over the shop. Nine wickets down for a hundred and fifty-one. Poor old Wilkie was waiting for the last man to come in and put an end to the terrible tension. The match was over all right; sixty-one runs takes some getting at any time, but when there's only one more wicket to fall—well, you know what I mean.

But ah! here comes the last man in! Seeing Grubby walking down the pavilion steps brought us to the full consciousness of the situation. There was something, however, about the easy manner in which our last hope walked to the wicket, with bat

under arm, sleeves well rolled up, and calmly fastening up his batting gloves, that seemed to tell of many days spent on the cricket field, and gave us a small spark of hope. Gone were our feelings of scorn for this boy; for was he not turning out for the school, to do his best, as he had said.

There were five more balls of the over to go. Carefully taking a bail to mark centre, and giving a sweeping glance round the field, Grubby took his stance to face the bowler. All round the ground the silence could be felt.

The first ball was a snorter. With a beautifully straight bat and an easy forward lunge the batsman returned it along the carpet to the bowler. The next was a fast one on the off-short, and with a gloriously timed square cut, Grubby whisked it to the boundary. These two strokes revealed the qualities of the batsman.

"Good old Grubby!" we yelled, anxious to let him see that we were with him.

"Fancy the old beggar being a dark horse like this," gurgled the delighted Mason.

"Jolly funny he hasn't turned out for a game before," remarked our captain; "there seems to be some mystery about the chap."

"There you are! just look at that!" shouted the same speaker, as the batsman with a perfect late cut added three more to his score. This, by the way, brought Wilkie up against the bowler.

"Keep your end up, Wilkie!" we yelled excitedly; "never mind about scoring!"

With a bat practically motionless, good old Wilkie obeyed orders till the end of the over. Fifty-four to win! Could we do it?

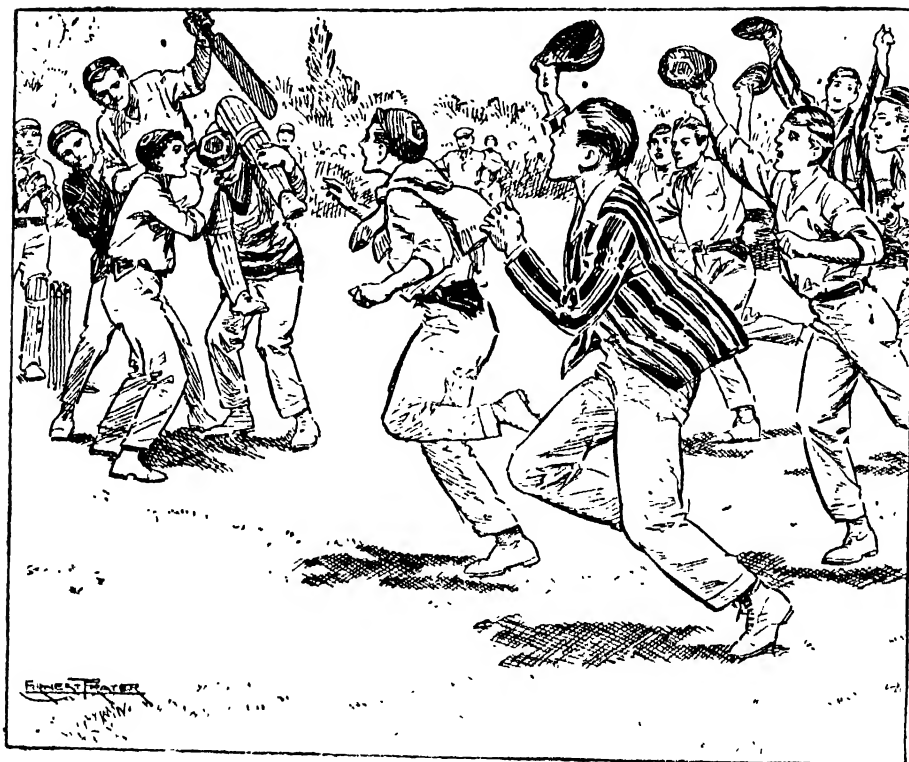
"Oh, isn't he a beauty!" we cried as Grubby commenced to paste the slow bowler all over the place. Every shot was on the carpet.

"Got any more bowlers?" we yelled in our delight to the Greystones' supporters, who, for the first time in the match, were beginning to look somewhat serious.

"Ha! ha! See how the artful beggar has sneaked another single at the end of the over to get the bowling!"

"Fifteen to win!" Then "eleven to win!" as a four came from a pretty leg glance off Grubby's bat. The excitement was intense.

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Grubby a hero

Fellows of both schools were yelling themselves hoarse now, and even the masters were jumping about like scalded cats. Old Short was pathetic to look at; he couldn't keep still for a minute, and was chewing a batting glove in his excitement.

"A lovely shot, sir!" we yelled as our hero brought off a clean drive just out of reach of mid-off.

Then with only four runs to win, a terrible thing happened. Grubby stepped out to the slow bowler and seemed to mistime the ball, for he got right under it, and it soared away to the long on boundary where the local Ransford was waiting for it on the rails. The fieldsman was certain to take the catch, and a deathly hush fell over the ground. The two batsmen were running for all they were worth.

"Oh!" and "Hurrah!" were the two cries that rent the air, for the fieldsman had missed the catch, the ball going straight into his hands and bouncing out again. But look at the score! The batsmen had run four and the scores were level!

The bowler seemed to take a terrific time before he commenced his run down to the wicket, but when the fateful ball came, there was a resounding smack, and point and cover-point were running for all they were worth. But there's no need to run, for they can't save the match, for our two batsmen have run the only one needed and are now making for the pavilion to the deafening cheers of the spectators, and the sporting hand-clapping of the defeated team.

With one mad rush we made for the wicket, and seizing our hero, chaired him up to the pavilion, to the ringing cheers of both schools.

To our surprise Grubby seemed rather upset, and asked us if we'd mind letting him lie down quietly for a while. Would we what? Why we'd have given him the bally earth if he'd wanted it. Eager hands reached out to provide cushions for his head; everyone was falling over himself to do something for our hero. He certainly looked all out—as white as a sheet, and a peculiar lack-lustre look about his eyes.

"Sorry to give you chaps all this trouble," murmured Grubby between gasps, but you see I'm not supposed to take up any sport again for another year or so yet. Rotten heart trouble from a bad strain a couple of years ago, you know."

This, then, was the explanation of good old Grubby's holding himself aloof from games; the chaps had ragged him so much at first that he had retired into his shell, and only a lucky accident had brought him out of it. By Jove! what cads we chaps had been, and no mistake! Never given old Grubby a chance!—but we'd soon make up for lost time. To think that the worm collector of yesterday was the same Grubby who had just won our big match so magnificently. Of course it wasn't Grubby who had changed—it was ourselves: we were the ones who had suddenly awakened to the fact that we were fat-headed prigs, taking everything for granted.

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Never shall I forget the reception that Grubby received as we drew up at the old School House, for the news had gone round like wild-fire. Talk about the Duke of Wellington's march through London—why it wasn't in it.

Fellows simply went wild with excitement, and it was all we could do to prevent old Grubby from almost being killed.

As soon as he had reached his study, Mason and I got together our own little clique and went up to see him. He seemed rather surprised as we held out our hands and offered our humble apologies for the rotten way we had treated him.

"Oh, don't let that worry you, you fellows; I was largely to blame," drawled Grubby. "You see, when my people left South Africa to live over in this part of the world I had to pull myself up by the roots from my old school in Capetown. It was pretty measly, I can tell you. I felt no end of an outsider coming here at my age. Then when the chaps seemed to resent my intrusion, and feeling awfully sick myself that I would not be able to play rugger or cricket, I decided to get my fun on my own. As it's turned out it looks as if I shall soon feel at home."

"Feel at home? You wait till the school concert to-night and you'll soon know all about that," we cried.

Grubby took all the hero-worship that same evening in such a clinking way. When you come to think of it though—it's just what you'd expect, after the way he had come through the other type of "worship" with such flying colours.

The school had to do without our hero's services on the playing-fields for another year—but it was worth waiting for! If the All Blacks are ever short of a half I know where they can get one. As for cricket!! Have you seen any Greystones boys lately? Excuse my hilarity!

THE BLACK LEADER

BY BEN C. ROBINSON

A bright moon hung over the ridges that frowned down upon the old New England farm home at Grandfather Allen's. The calm silence of the night was unbroken save for the faint sighing of the old mill-race where the pulpwood was ground. Not a breath of air stirred the willows that lay touched with silver lines under the full moon.

The family had gathered round the fireplace, for even though it was now May, the tang in the air was still sharp there in the Berkshires, and the great fireplace glowed bright with the birch billets which Grandfather and we boys had split and ricked in the woodyard the autumn before.

Grandfather was reading his weekly paper, while the rest of us were busy at our lessons, for the closing of school was not far away, and we were expected to pass well if we were to attend the seminary in Woodsfield, the neighbouring college town. We three boys had studied hard that winter, and Grandfather had promised that we should go to the seminary if the wool crop came up to his expectations that spring.

The Big Pasture up the cove, to the east of the long ridges that fell away abruptly to the pulp mill, was the grazing ground of the Merino flock upon which we depended for the money that was to pay our school expenses. The sunny east slopes of this cove were places of beauty, with lush young grass, great boulder piles and stumps where the young lambs had been disporting themselves, as young lambs will in the spring season, for the past two or three weeks. Over one hundred and fifty ewes grazed there, and half that number of young lambs played about the cove sides in the sunshine on these beautiful spring days.

All was well with the flock. We had closed up the sheep barn, as the weather was now warm enough for the flock to sleep in the pastures at night.

The Black Leader

It was nearly bed-time for all of us when suddenly Grandfather dropped his paper, and a startled, listening expression came into his face. The rustle of papers and books ceased as a long, blood-curdling howl drifted down from the ridges. Though all doors were closed, it penetrated the room with startling clearness.

At first we thought it the howl of a wolf, but then we knew no wolves ranged in this section of New England. High and long drawn out, the weird howl echoed through the night air—the pack call of some fierce animal.

Again and again, as we listened, the howl woke the echoes of the little farming valley. Then it passed away, becoming faint and fainter as the animal passed back down along the farther side of the ridge line.

Grandfather hurriedly crossed the room and opened the outside door that faced the pulp mill and the frowning hills. We boys followed him, standing in silent dread, trying to catch another echo of the howling, but nothing more was heard of it.

“What was it, Grandfather?” asked Jack as the old gentleman stood serious and silent on the porch.

“That was the pack call of a sheep-killing dog, boys, and I’m worried for the safety of the Merinos up there in the cove,” he replied.

Nothing more was said. We re-entered the house, and shortly afterward slipped away to our beds in the old farmhouse loft. A feeling of gloom and dread had been cast over the household by this threatening half-wolf howl which we had heard.

“I believe something is threatening the sheep,” Jack said as we talked the occurrence over in bed.

“I hope it isn’t the mysterious leader that’s been killing so many sheep over on Moose Pond pastures,” muttered Sam, the youngest of the three boys, as with a shiver he covered his head with the warm woollen blankets and drifted off into sleep.

For a long time Jack and I talked in low tones about the sheep. There had been quite a bit of worry among sheep owners in our neighbourhood about the terrible depredations that had been committed upon their neighbours’ flocks on Moose Pond pastures,

a wild, half-cleared section lying some twelve miles south of our community. Whole flocks had been crippled or destroyed by a mysterious pack of outlaw dogs led, so it was claimed, by a great black leader that howled at nights in a terrifying manner and called his pack together. And the worst feature of these depredations was that this leader's call not only drew outlaw dogs to his side, but a number of dog owners over in that section had found that their own watch-dogs, those which had been trusted with the flocks since they were mere puppies, also at times joined this outlaw pack. The leader's lonely howls seemed to have some evil power to attract recruits to his pack—dogs which before the appearance of the mysterious leader in the Moose Pond section had been trusted house- and watch-dogs, and even herd dogs.

After a while we drifted off to sleep, but some time in the grey, cold night there was a knocking on our door. It was Grandfather.

"Quick, boys! Get your clothes on and come! The sheep are in trouble!" Grandfather's voice quivered with alarm.

As we tumbled out in the chill, grey light of the room there came to my ears the faint, far-off barking of a dog running toward the cove.

As quickly as possible we threw on our clothes. Jack, my older brother, grabbed a rifle that leaned against the wall in one corner of the room. On the porch outside we found Grandfather with his heavy fox-gun waiting for us.

"I wonder where old Gip is?" he asked. "I've whistled for him, but he doesn't come!" And there was a suspicious note in the old gentleman's voice. Old Gip, as we called the big collie dog which had been with us for years, was the best sheep-dog in that section. He had taken care of the herd ever since I could remember, and was trusted and loved by the whole family. Tonight nothing was to be seen or heard of him. We called and whistled for him, but he didn't come.

"Never mind him! We must hurry if we want to save the flock!" Grandfather commanded, and we started for the pulp-mill bridge as fast as we could run. It was several hundred yards

The Black Leader

round the hill to the cove pasture, and in the darkness of the early night hours, just before dawn, we stumbled and fell many times, but at last we reached the edge of the pasture. The barking which I had first heard had long since ceased. Not a sound was to be heard at first, and we hoped the pack had tired of attempting to run down the flock and slunk off. But no! As we came to the bars of the pasture we heard that peculiar sound of many animals fleeing, and the sharp panting of savage dogs pursuing.

A great, dark shadow milled swiftly along the sides of the cove a short distance above the bars. With all our might we ran toward the place. As we ran I could see many struggling sheep weltering in the grey light which had begun to dissipate the darkness in the pasture. The dogs had surrounded the flock and were killing them ruthlessly. As the sheep ran blindly about, trying to escape, the dogs, apparently some dozen in number, rushed in among them, slashing with savage fangs at the throats of the sheep and lambs. One vicious snap of keen fangs and a sheep's neck was severed. It was the slaughter of blind, innocent, helpless animals.

When we came close enough Grandfather started shooting, and Jack opened fire with his rifle. In a short time we had put the outlaw dogs to flight. The bewildered and demoralized sheep were scattered everywhere, some trying to hide their foolish heads in tufts of grass and briar clumps, or leaping to the top of stumps and rock piles, as they awaited their fate, helpless with fear.

Grandfather had merely wounded two of the raiding dogs, and as we started to go up the slope where they were trying to drag themselves away to the protection of the thickets at the top of the cove we heard something that stopped us in our tracks. From the uncertain gloom of the cove bottom there came the savage, fearful clamour of a terrible struggle. Not knowing what to expect, we slowly advanced toward the place from which came the sounds of a deadly combat. Grandfather was ahead, his heavy double-barrelled gun ready for instant use.

In the very bottom of the cove we came upon a sight I shall never forget. In the centre of a circle of dead sheep two large



A battle to the death

animals whirled and gyrated in furious, bewildering battle. The soft new-ground sod was torn and scarred with great claw marks, and the few thin clumps of briars that lined the sides of an old "wash" were trampled into the torn sod. A battle to the death was being fought there in the half gloom of the cove between two large dogs.

"It's Gip, I believe!" shouted Grandfather as he rushed forward with his gun raised to fire.

With deep, fearful growls and panting, foam-flecked jaws the dogs whirled and circled in their fearful fight. Grandfather attempted several times to interfere and help Gip, for it was indeed

The Black Leader

our faithful old herd-dog which was battling with a great, short-haired, black, wolf-like dog. The fight was so furious that it was useless for him to try to get in a blow at the old dog's antagonist.

With encouraging shouts we rushed down to where they struggled. The old herd-dog rushed blindly into his enemy as we arrived on the scene, and there was the sound of crushing bone as his strong jaws closed over the black outlaw's foreleg. With a terrible cry the black dog was thrown to his back, and quick as a flash Gip released his hold on the leg and drove his powerful muzzle into the outlaw's throat. For a few seconds the torn ground was thrown into a shower over and around them. Then with a strong, convulsive effort the black dog threw Gip off again, and turning started to flee from the scene, but the blinding flash of Grandfather's heavy fox-gun stopped him and ended his sheep-killing career for ever.

We ran forward to the place where old Gip wavered and weakly attempted to follow. Throwing our arms around him we helped the tottering protector of the flock to stand up. Grandfather carefully examined the outlaw dog and found it to be the mysterious leader of the pack without a shadow of doubt. As we carried the wounded herd-dog down the cove toward the farmhouse he growled savagely at the two outlaw dogs Grandfather had shot when we first came upon the scene.

"Never mind, old fellow!" Grandfather said affectionately. "You've done more than any of us to save the flock this morning. Had you not fought the leader of the pack the entire flock would have been killed before we got to the pasture."

For years afterwards the faithful old collie hobbled about the farm, helping with the flocks. His terrible fight that night with the black outlaw dog had crippled him for life. He was no longer the strong, active Gip as before, but he will always be loved by all of us for saving the flock of Merinos the night the mysterious leader and his outlaw pack raided the farm.

THE BRIDGE OF DEATH

BY BERNARD CRONIN •

I

"Well, they're at it again," said Bill Saltus, as he handed out the mails at Boonta Homestead gates. •

Peter Ogilvie, regarding him lazily from the shady side of the coach, put a casual question.

"Who are?"

Old Saltus grinned.

"If I knew that, my son, it's not a mere driver I'd be; seeing half a dozen owners, at least, have promised a reward, not to mention the police."

"He means the cattle duffers, don't you Bill?" Wally Greig called from his seat in the saddle. "Wake up, Pete."

"Aye, you bet I do," said Saltus. "Cattle duffers it is, and mighty smart ones at that. See now—how many head was taken from the runs last month? I'll tell you. Near half a hundred. And to-day there's a tale around the hills that night-riders were seen going past The Waterhole just after midnight."

"But, hang it all, where do they plant the cattle?" Pete protested. "You can't lift a mob into the air."

"That's right; I'll admit it," said Saltus. He picked up the reins. "But it stands to reason the cattle must be somewhere. Things are getting serious. There's a rumour the police are sending up a plain-clothes man. Well, so long."

Pete stood staring after him until he had vanished round a distant corner of scrub. He was roused by his pal's voice.

"I've got an idea, Pete."

"It's your first then," grunted Pete, wiping the perspiration from his face. "Take care of it."

"I'm not joshing," said Wally. His eyes went to the jagged

The Bridge of Death

outline of the Norfolk Ranges, that reared itself dimly against the background of heat-laden sky, and a little frown came on his face. "Did it ever occur to you that there are plenty of pockets on the Norfolks where cattle could be bunched?"

"No grass," Pete objected. "And mighty little water."

"That's only a guess. There may be plenty of both. Look here—we're going to find out."

Pete had climbed back into his own saddle, with the homestead mail strapped across the fork. His bushy eyebrows lifted humorously as he turned to regard his friend.

"Are we? Who said so?"

"I did," Wally informed him promptly. "I've had an idea that way for long enough. It's not altogether on account of the duffers either; remember that old miner your dad found pegging out on Gidya Gully? He had some weird yarns about the inside places of the range."

"The poor beggar was off his nut," Pete affirmed.

"Not all the time. Anyhow, his history wasn't delirious too. And when he said that the Norfolks were used ages ago as a hide-out for escaping convicts, both from Circular Head, here in Tassie, and from the mainland, he was only saying what a lot of others said. Things are pretty slack round home at present, and I guess your dad won't want us so bad that we can't put up a swag of tucker and light out for the hills right away."

"Oh, well—if you're dead set on it . . ." agreed Pete.

He slammed his mount to a smart canter, his own eyes going involuntarily to the subject of their discussion. Without a doubt there was something infinitely alluring and mysterious in the great pinnacles of earth that beckoned beyond the wilting green of the foothills. The slopes of the vast range were mottled with sunlight, and the ridges were veined with a tracing of dead timber. Deep purple gashes marked the course of ravine and gully, and to the right wound the silver outline of the Bat River.

"It's not more than twenty-five miles to the spur," Wally's voice came through the singing of the wind at his ears. "We'll have a snack and start right away, unless your dad objects. I say, here's a button-grass sundowner for you, if you like."

Pete had already sighted the approaching man. A more disreputable object he had never seen. The swaggie was moving to intersect their course to the homestead, and presently they came within hailing distance. In spite of himself Wally could not help feeling sorry for the man, for obviously he was weary. A ragged hat was pulled over his face, and all that the pals first saw of it was a stubble of beard and a pair of rather keen eyes.

They reined up in answer to a call.

"Boonta? Yes, you're on Boonta now. The homestead is a mile on yet though," Pete assured him.

The man looked longingly at their horses, and Wally was moved to further compassion.

"I say—hand your bluey up to my mate, and hop up behind me. We'll give you a lift. Mr. Ogilvie—that's the father of Pete here, and the owner of Boonta—might find a job for you. He'll give you a feed and somewhere to sleep to-night, anyhow."

The swagman assented promptly. Hanging fast to Wally's waist, at the back of the saddle, he presently volunteered some information, in a not unpleasant voice.

"I'll be glad of a feed all right, and mighty thankful. But I won't be staying. I'm on my way to a job of my own."

"Fine," said Wally. "You don't look the regular hobo type. Which way are you making?"

"Oh, west," said the man vaguely. He waved his arm in the direction of the ranges. "Great cattle country up there, I should say. You'll know it well, I suppose?"

"There aren't many that do," said Wally shortly. For some reason the question disturbed him. "Well, here we are. If you chivvy round the bunk-house you'll find 'Old Saucepans', the cook. He'll fix you up."

"Thanks," said the man briefly. "I'm obliged for the lift."

"Now to put it up to your dad," said Wally, as they rode on. He suddenly squared his shoulders. "I say, old chap, I've got a hunch there's going to be some fun out of this. I couldn't tell you why, but things seem all at once to be on the move. Well—let 'em all come. I guess we're due for a bit of excitement."

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II

The long Tasmanian twilight was dwindling into night as the two lads halted in a pocket of the foothills. They had ridden hard through the heat of the afternoon, anxious to enter the actual confines of the range itself while daylight remained. There was something eerie in the vast silence all about them. Such sounds as reached them seemed to come from a world apart. From the black depths of the ravines, overhung by all imaginable shapes of rock summits, came at intervals the ghostly echoes of a faint stirring, as of wild things moving from their lair at the closing down of the darkness. A thin wind ran up and down the strings of the silence in a series of little movements like the whisperings of a concealed audience.

"This place gives a man the creeps," Pete ventured, with a barely concealed shudder. "Think the horses will be all right?"

"The way I'll stake 'em they'll have to stay till doomsday," said Wally. He stared around him, then turned to his companion. "Notice that pinnacle to the north? It looks like . . . now, what does it look like?"

Pete followed the direction of his pal's pointing finger, and a little exclamation escaped him.

"It's a bridge."

"A bridge! What, up here in the foothills! There isn't a made road within ten miles of us, you chump."

"Well, a natural bridge then," said Pete.

"Well, we can't stop looking at it all night," said Wally, with unusual irritation. He hated to confess, even to himself, that his normal self-confidence seemed to have deserted him. The hot March night was shutting them in like a blanket. The air was full of menace. "Let's feed and go to sleep, while we can."

Pete, himself fighting a similar depression, agreed. They spread their blankets presently in the lee of a boulder and lay down. In a short time they were asleep.

What woke Pete he would have found it difficult to say. He sat up, throwing the blankets aside, and listened. The night was



"Now, what does it look like?"

absolutely quiet. Yet he could have sworn that a bare second ago—cutting through the uneasy course of his dreaming, as it were—the hills had yielded a sharp sound.

He looked round at Wally, who lay on his back, arms out flung on the dry heather. He was breathing heavily, but that was all. Yet it was of course possible he had called out in his sleep. Perhaps that was it.

Puzzled, Pete was about to lie back again, when the barest thread of sound came to his straining ears. He recognized it as the whicker of a horse. Immediately he sat up again, and shook his pal by the arm. Wally stirred at the touch.

"Eh!" he muttered sleepily.

"I don't know," said Pete, in excuse. "Something wrong, I think. Get up!"

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Wally came wide awake in an instant.

"What is it?" he demanded.

"I told you I don't know," said Pete. "I heard one of our horses whicker. I daresay I'm an ass, but I'm uneasy. Let's go down to them. What's the time."

"Four o'clock," Wally told him, after consulting his wrist-watch. "You've been dreaming. Well, come on down then. At this rate, we'll both be getting the willies."

The sky was faintly aglow in the east, and the dawn wind was already stirring, as they descended the slope to the grass-pocket where the horses were picketed. In the faint starlight they made out the shapes of the horses. The animals were on their feet, heads erect, facing the saucer-like depression of the farther summit, whereon the scarcely distinguishable bridge of rock spanned an unknown void.

Wally was reaching out to grasp a halter when the darkness broke to a sharp sound. Beyond doubt it had only one source, and with instinctive caution the lad rapped out a quick sentence, at the same time drawing the muzzle of his own horse tightly against his breast.

"Blanket Amber. That was the echo of shod hoofs. Hurry before they whicker."

Pete held the mare's soft nose gently but firmly in the crook of his arm, barely in time to prevent her throwing up her head in greeting to her kind that were passing. Even as he did so there came again the sharp sound of iron striking the rock.

"Look!" came Wally's voice.

High up in the sky, as it seemed, outlined against the opal horizon, a horse and rider were silhouetted for the fraction of a second. They moved like marionettes across the frail pathway of the bridge, and were gone. A second and a third rider followed.

There was a brief interval, during which both lads had great difficulty in retaining their hold on the horses, then two more riders flitted in ghostly fashion in the wake of the others. The clink of hoofs became fainter and fainter, then came silence.

For nearly five minutes longer Wally and Pete remained as

they were. Then they released the horses. The animals moved about uneasily, but made no attempt now to whicker.

"The night-riders," said Pete.

"We've got to find the way to that bridge," Wally declared positively. His voice trembled with excitement. "There were five of them. Did you count? Five duffers could get away with a lot of stock. We'll have to be mighty careful, though. They'll have gone into camp until dusk comes."

"If they're out all night, they'll be going straight to sleep," said Pete, as they made back to camp for early breakfast. "Men can't do without sleep."

"There'll be a guard?"

"I suppose so. Probably there are six of them; five on the rustle at night, and one to do the chores and stand sentry. We'll have to chance it."

The sun was sweeping up from the horizon by the time they had broken camp and got the horses ready. A veil of smoke, drifting down from some distant forest fire, joined itself to the purpling haze of heat. The increasing wind whipped the fine sand of the gully-beds into their faces, stinging like insects. The horses went with heads lowered, hoofs pawing to find hold on the broken ascent of the saddleback ridge they were climbing.

In the daylight the rock bridge showed clearly. But it was not easy to come at, nevertheless. So involved were the successive ravines and ridges that they seemed to be in a sort of maze. At times they came within a hundred yards of their objective, only to find the way blocked by an impassable precipice. Incredible though it appeared, it was nearly noon before they had threaded their way to the spur giving clear approach to the bridge.

At Wally's suggestion they dismounted and left the horses in the shade thrown by a gigantic cliff, which towered overhead to the height of some two hundred feet.

"The duffers' camp may be a mile ahead, or it may be a yard—we don't know," he said. "An ounce of caution is worth a ton of conceit. That's a new one for you. My idea is to get along on foot. If it comes to that, the bridge, or whatever it is, doesn't look too solid. By George, but it's hot!"

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Even at that hour little wisps of steam rose sluggishly from the crevices of the rock, as the moisture of overnight was called forth in response to the searching rays of the sun. The whole face of the valley seemed literally to be smoking. A red, powderish dust mingled with the stifling air.

A narrow, faintly marked trail led round a group of high boulders, and this they followed. It led to a ledge of grey-green rock, poised sheer above the bed of a dried watercourse fifty feet beneath. At the far end it took a sudden sharp turn, and they found themselves confronted by a natural formation the like of which they had never before encountered.

It was a ledge of shalestone, at its widest not more than five feet, and in the narrowest part scarcely two feet. It spanned the gorge below for the space of forty or fifty feet, ending at the farther side in a round, disc-like rock platform, having the appearance of a stadium. A shoulder of ridge hid the trail from sight.

"How in the name of Mike you could get a horse over this, beats me," said Pete in amazement, as he viewed the phenomenon. "Yet those night-riders seemed to pass over without a hitch."

"Horses well trained," Wally asserted. "Let's nip over and see if the coast is clear beyond. If it is we'll come back and school our mokes up and down on foot."

Arrived at the rock stadium the way broke into an open ridge, studded with stunted currant-bush, and crossed here and there by narrow, scrub-lined gutters. There was no sign of a path, nor was there any evidence of a camp.

"Looks safe enough," ventured Pete.

They went back and got the horses. It called for all their tact and patience to induce the animals to set foot on the bridge. Yet by slow degrees this timorousness was overcome.

One portion in particular needed the utmost care in crossing. Here the under-pinning rock had crumbled to barely six inches in thickness. This insecurity was about midway, and was itself nearly six feet wide. It was the weakest part of the bridge, and, indeed, looked as though it might give way at any time.

"Waterworn with storm gutters," said Wally. "The corrosion must have been going on for centuries. It'll go with a crash

one of these fine days—you'll see. Well, we'll shove the horses in among the scrub there, and go ahead again. There's a bit of a spring yonder, where we can water them first."

Half an hour later found them approaching on foot an angle of scrub. Rounding it, Pete halted abruptly, retreating with such precipitation as to thrust Wally back into cover behind him.

"Man over there," he breathed. "Twig the hat?"

Wally peered cautiously. At first he could see nothing. Then his darting eyes made out the crown of a man's hat appearing over a bush, as if balanced on the crest of the slope. While he watched it he saw it move slightly.

"Night riders' sentry," he whispered back. His gaze travelled on over the slope to the jumble of cliffs beyond. "By heck! will you look at those caves, Pete? You could hide a regiment in there. What a gem of a place for a duffers' camp."

Pete made no reply. He was still watching the sentry's hat, and to his imagination it seemed that a pair of shining eyes looked from under the ragged brim directly at them.

"Wally, he's spotted us. I'll bet you."

"Eh!" said his pal. His own gaze returned. "Well, why doesn't he make a move then?"

"He wants to make sure, I suppose," mumbled Pete.

For a second his eyes sought the ground at their feet, and his lips immediately pursed in the form, but not the sound, of a satisfied whistle.

"Old boy," he said, "we've found them. Look at the cattle tracks. There aren't any runs up here. You can't mistake this."

What more he might have said was rudely interrupted by a sharp command from Wally.

"Go for your life, boy. There's three of them!"

Startled into action Pete swung round.

From three different angles three men approached. The one in the centre—the man on guard—held a gun at the ready.

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III

For just a second Pete's wits nearly deserted him. To his first thought escape was completely cut off. Then while he hesitated, his pal's voice, fraught with anxiety, was at his ear.

"Run for the caves, it's our only hope."

The unexpectedness of their appearance proved their salvation, for the time being, at least. Like hares from their nest they broke cover, regardless of the sudden harsh command to stop. The man on the left—a huge, pock-marked ruffian, followed up his oath of astonishment by a terrific swing at Pete. The lad saw the blow coming, but his pace was too great to allow of any dodging. He did not attempt it. Calling every ounce of reserve to his aid he dived at the duffer's legs, bowling him to the ground. For a second there was a medley of threshing arms and legs. Then Pete was on his feet, racing for the black opening of the cave ahead. Out of the tail of his eye he caught a glimpse of Wally coming neck and neck with another of the duffers.

Pete entered the cave and immediately swung round. He was not clear as to what he meant to do. His one thought was to help Wally, who was a bare arm's-length ahead of his pursuer. The man with the gun was calling to his mate to stand aside and let him shoot. The tones of his voice left no possibility for doubting his deadly intention.

Groping frantically about him Pete's hand encountered a lump of stone. He lifted it, poised a second, and hurled it with all his might. The aim, for a marvel, was true. The stone took the duffer squarely in the chest, sending him reeling to the earth. Like a flash Wally was round the sheltering corner of the cave, his entry almost coinciding with the report of a shot-gun.

"Which way now?" he gasped.

Before them was a tunnel whose circular entrance was filled with blackness. There was no help for it, however. Escape, if it lay anywhere, lay there. Already the thud of oncoming feet rang in their ears. The shouting of the men outside was answered from somewhere close at hand.

The tunnel seemed to widen as they stumbled headlong into the darkness. Wally's one fear now was lest the man with the gun should fire before they could outdistance the shot. He could have shouted his relief when the sudden dimming of the pursuit told him they had turned a corner in the tunnel, and were beyond immediate harm. He called a halt, blessing the impulse which had made him bring an electric torch.

"Hold on, Pete. We've got to know where we're going. By heck! that was a narrow squeak. Those chaps will never let us leave here alive, you can bank on that."

The sudden light dazzled them, but by closing their eyes a few seconds their sight cleared. The tunnel rang with swelling echoes. The pursuit had not ceased. Wherever the way led they must follow.

A few yards ahead the tunnel forked. Two openings showed themselves in the walls, that ran now with little trickles of slime.

"One way's as good as another, I guess," said Pete, taking his breath in great gulps. "We'll go to the right."

A sudden thought came to him, and he spun round.

"Hold on a second. It's a bare chance, but we might spoof them, if we're lucky." While he talked he was finding his handkerchief, which he threw on the floor some paces along the entrance to the left. "Seeing this they're almost bound to believe we went this way. Now, are you set? Come on then."

With the light of the torch to help them the going was much easier. To their immense relief the tunnel widened as they went. They came presently to a kind of grotto, with high overhead a narrow gap through which poured a stream of golden sunlight. At sight of it they cried out simultaneously.

"If we could only climb to the top, we'd be right," panted Wally. He motioned Pete to stand still, and listened with all his ears. "Loud cheers—I believe those brutes have fallen for your handkerchief wheeze. They've taken the wrong turning. But you can bet they'll soon find out. Listen a second!"

It was the echoing tap of stealthy feet. One, at least, of their pursuers had refused to be drawn aside by Pete's device.

The two lads flattened themselves one on either side of the

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tunnel mouth. They were totally unarmed. If the oncomer should prove to be the man with the gun their chance was small.

Nearer and nearer crept the feet. Presently they halted, and it seemed that the owner was investigating the sudden silence. They could almost hear the quick intake of his breath.

Followed a slight rustling. Then, inch by inch, the menacing barrel of a shot gun projected into the grotto. Their hopes had been vain.

Now or never was the time for action. Wally, all his muscles tensed for the coming struggle, threw Pete a quick look. In dumb show he endeavoured to make his pal understand just what his part must be. Then, as a hairy hand came slowly into view, Wally threw himself sideways, clutching the gun barrel with both hands, and lifting it upward, even as the trigger was pulled. As the cavern reverberated to the concussion Pete sprang at the duffer's shoulders, twining his arms desperately about the man's neck, clinging about him with all his strength.

After the first surprised outcry the man fell to struggling silently. His strength was almost herculean. The lads fought with equal determination. And presently the whole affair seemed to resolve itself into combat for the possession of the gun. All rules of fairness went by the board. It was a tussle for very life itself.

Pete's strength was failing fast, when unexpectedly the end came. The three, swaying in a grotesque heap, lost their balance and fell. The duffer was undermost and his head struck a jutting rock. He lay groaning feebly, as they scrambled exhausted to their feet. It was the work of a second to bind his wrists and ankles with strips torn hastily from their clothing.

"He'll be all right when he comes round," Wally managed to say. "That shot'll rouse the rest of them. Here—help me pile some of these big boulders underneath the vent, so that we can reach the edge."

They fell hurriedly to work. Yet all at once Pete desisted with a stifled shout of sheer astonishment. Beneath a slab of stone, which had required the full of his efforts to dislodge, was revealed an oblong cavity. He stared into it stupidly.

Beneath his eyes rested a little heap of shining sand, from

which protruded the rotted remains of the canvas which had once contained it. Pete knew gold dust when he saw it. He had unearthed, by sheer accident, an almost stupendous treasure. Here then was verification of the stories of treasure trove hidden by the bushrangers of a dead and gone generation in the trough of the great ranges. The thing was unbelievable, but it was true.

He heard Wally gasping in surprise at his elbow. Then came a sudden interruption. From overhead came a man's voice, hailing them sharply.

"Below there! Who let off that gun?"

IV

Involuntarily Pete released his hold, so that the stone slab fell back into its place with a dull thud. Looking up he saw to his further great astonishment the scrubby visage of the swagman they had, as they thought, left behind at Boonta. Recognition came to both sides simultaneously.

"By the eternal shades of Jupiter," called the man above, "if it isn't the lads that gave me a lift! What are you doing there? Here—hold on—it's my turn to give a hand; questions can come later. Can you climb a rope? Stand clear then a moment."

With the words a line came snaking down into the grotto. Wally seized it. Bracing himself he went up hand over hand. A second later Pete joined him. The three stood blinking at each other in the blinding sunshine.

"Well?" the swagman interrogated sharply.

They saw that, somehow, his down-at-heels appearance had totally left him. His eyes were narrowed to slits. His voice had a business-like rasp.

Wally's confidence in the man was immediate. Almost before he knew it he was blurting out the whole story of their adventure. At its conclusion the swagman extended his hand.

"Shake. I guess I know the truth when I hear it. I don't mind telling you I thought for a time you might be in with the cattle duffers. Eh! No; I reckon I'm not a dinkum sundowner; though I managed to make most people think I was. I'm a plain-

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clothes policeman, if you want to know. I've been trailing these chaps for weeks. Here's where I need aid. You lads are all right, but your numbers are wrong. We want some of those hefty stockmen from your dad's station to do some rounding up of another kind. We'll get right back to Boonta and . . ."

The sentence was never finished.

Suddenly, as it seemed from the very ground at their feet, a number of men sprang into sight. Before he could make a move to defend himself the policeman was struck on the head, and sent reeling and unconscious. At the same time Wally's arms were seized as in a vice. He yelled with all his might.

"Hook it, Pete! Run, you chump! Run!"

The advice was not needed. Like a rabbit Pete was already racing and doubling over the uneven ground. He had his second wind now, and the plight of his friends urged him on as nothing else could have done. He lost all sense of direction as he fled. When finally the sounds of this second pursuit vanished into the distance, dusk had fallen and a three-quarter moon was mounting the shoulder of the range. Night came down—silent, mysterious.

The thing to do was to find the horses. Pete repeated this over and over again to himself, as if repeating a lesson. He did not dare to think what was possibly happening to Wally and the policeman. His sole anxiety was to get back to the homestead and muster the station hands to a rescue.

Here a natural sense of location came to his rescue. Without in the least knowing why, Pete set out in a certain direction. And presently he was rewarded by picking up a landmark.

Now, at least, he knew where he was. Down in the hollows the night things were stirring once again to life and action. There were strange and terrifying echoes on every side. He went ahead doggedly, thankful for the widening light of the moon.

He found the horses standing where they had been left in the scrub-lined gutter. As he climbed into Amber's saddle, there came to his ears a sharp, staccato report, followed by a series of little echoes, which resolved finally into a dull rumbling. That, too, ceased, and the accustomed silence swung back into place.

But not for long.



She rose like a bird

As he faced the mare towards the bridge, from out of the thick shadows of the timber line rode three of the night-riders. They saw him, and came whooping in pursuit. In the space of a few seconds the night air rang to the sound of galloping hoofs.

Ambler responded gallantly to Pete's urging. At first she ran stiffly, following her long rest, but soon she came into her stride. Well in the lead Pete swung round the stadium plateau and raced for the great bridge which overhung the ravine.

So tremendous was the pace that to pull the mare to a halt was not possible in the distance remaining. Yet, in one brief, horrified second, Pete was prompted to cast himself from the saddle. For in the full, yellow gleam of the moon the rock bridge showed itself split midway. The sound he had heard a moment back had been the tremendous reverberations of the collapsing

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stone. Between the broken and jagged ends of the fallen structure spun the moonlit void of a stark abyss.

If the mare saw it also, Pete had no means of knowing, for her stride never faltered a second. Three great strides brought her to the edge. Pete closed his eyes. He felt the beautifully barrelled body of the mare rising to the desperate urge of his hands and knees. A tremor ran through her. She seemed all at once to be galvanized into superlative effort. She rose like a bird, a snort of fright escaping her distended nostrils. For what felt like an eternity they hung in mid-air. Then, with scarcely a foot to spare, the mare made a landing. With a rattle of hoofs she swept on. They had crossed the bridge of death into safety.

Elated though he was, Pete could not repress a shudder at the awful echoes which swept in his rear. Only too well he knew what had befallen some, at least, of his pursuers-- dashed into eternity.

How he completed the ride Pete did not know. Yet presently he found himself at the homestead, stammering out his story. He felt kindly hands lifting him from the saddle, and managed a last whispered inquiry whether Amber was hurt.

It was full daylight when he returned to consciousness, strangely surprised to find himself bandaged as the result of unheeded and unremembered falls. Wally was seated by the bedside.

"You're safe, old chap?" Pete demanded weakly.

"You bet," said Wally, delighted at his pal's recovery. "Your lad and about twenty of the hands came down on those hills like an army. There's another way in besides the bridge--my word, you would hear the boys talking about Amber's ride, as they call it--and they dug us out in great style. There are only four of the luffers left to stand their trial, anyhow. Two of them went down into the ravine."

"Poor beggars," said Pete. Suddenly he remembered. "And he treasure, Wally?"

"Goes to the Crown--treasure trove, you know. But, North, that's our policeman swaggie, says we're sure to get a cut out of it. They think it's part of the dust looted from the Ajax mine, in the fifties."

